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THE
WORKS
OF
SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

VOL. III.

A

THE
WORKS

OF
SAMUEL JOHNSON

VOL. III

THE
WORKS
OF
SOAME JENYNS, Esq.
IN FOUR VOLUMES.

INCLUDING SEVERAL PIECES
NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,
SHORT SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY OF
THE AUTHOR'S FAMILY,
AND ALSO OF HIS LIFE;

By CHARLES NALSON COLE, Esq.

V O L. III.

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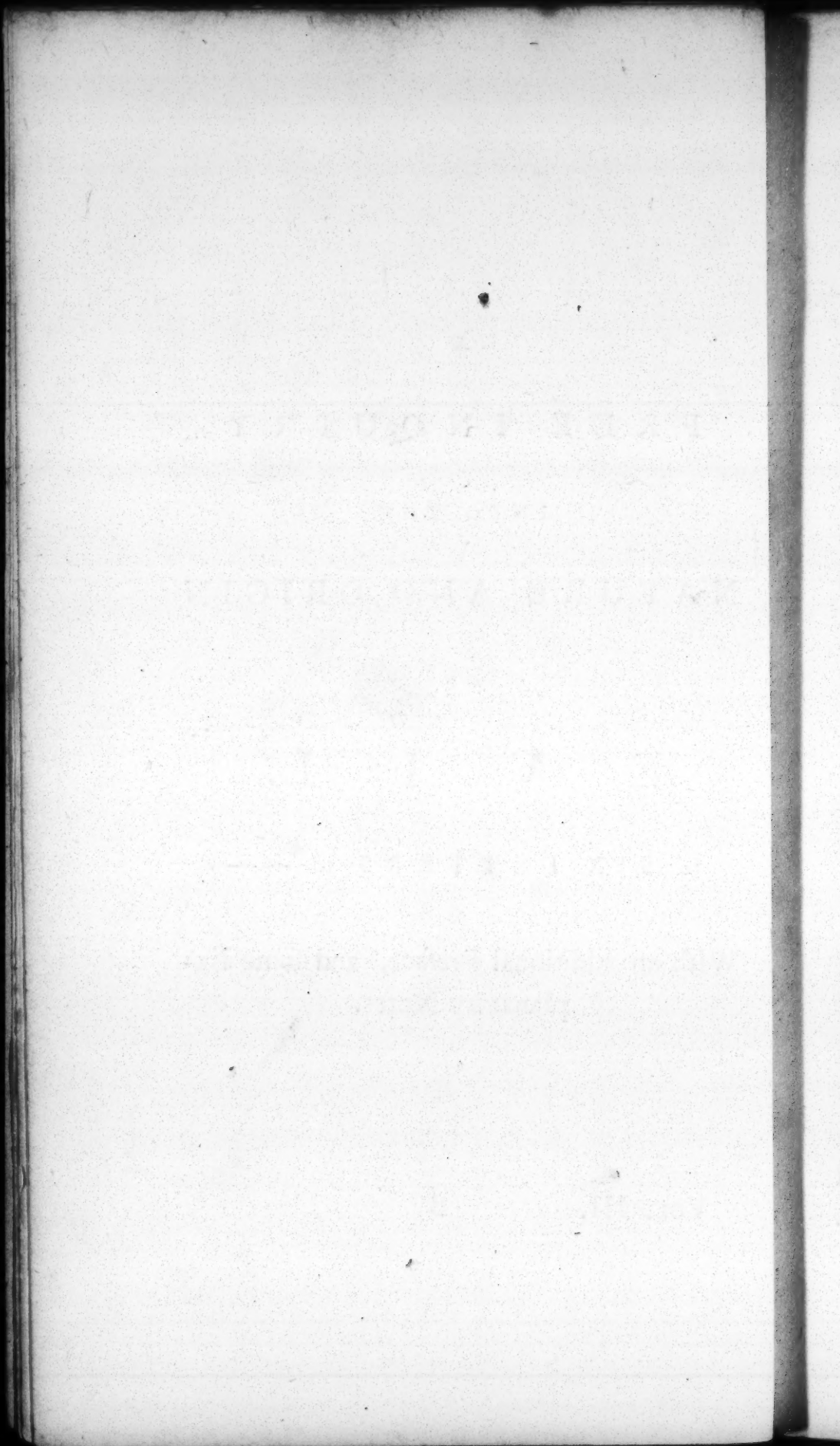
A
FREE INQUIRY
INTO THE
NATURE AND ORIGIN
OF
E V I L.

In SIX LETTERS to —.

With an additional Preface, and some Ex-
planatory Notes.

VOL. III.

B



P R E F A C E.

THE author of the following letters is too well acquainted with human nature to be in the least surpris'd at the reception they have met with; that is, that they have been much liked, much censured, and little assented to: Truth, he knows, has at all times been so received; for though by her native beauty she is sure to charm, yet from her repugnancy to most men's interests, she is seldom welcome: politicians are afraid of her, parties detest her, and all professions agree that she is mad, and very dangerous if suffered to go about in public: he knows that mankind live all in masquerade, and that whoever presumes to come amongst them barefaced must expect to be abused by the whole assembly: he could therefore have no motive for thus imparting his free sentiments to the public, except the dictates of his own heart,

which tell him, that it is every man's duty, who comes into the world, to use his best endeavours, however insignificant, to leave is as much wiser, and as much better as he can. Induced by this motive alone, he at first undertook this inquiry; and now, actuated by the same principle, and unprovoked by all the senseless misapprehensions, and malicious misconstructions, with which it has been tortured, he will here, with all possible conciseness, endeavour to explain those parts of it, which have been so misunderstood, or misrepresented, and give satisfaction to all, who are either able or willing to understand it.

The first letter treats of evils in general, and endeavours to prove, that they all owe their existence, not to any voluntary admission of a benevolent Creator, but to the necessity of their own natures, that is, to the impossibility of excluding them from any system of created Beings whatever; and that in all such systems, however wisely contrived, they must have, and must at all times

times have had a place. Against this but one material objection has been urged ; which is this, that, in order to make room for this necessity of evil, the real existence of a paradisiacal state is represented as at all times impossible ; and, consequently, the Mosaic account of that state is utterly exploded, on which the whole fabric of the Christian Religion is erected. How far the literal belief of that account is essential to the true faith of a Christian need not be here decided ; because not the least mention of it is made in this letter : and therefore this objection is intirely founded on a mistake. The argument there made use of is only this, that some have endeavoured to justify the goodness of God from the introduction of evil, by asserting, that at the beginning there was no such thing, but that, at first, all creation came out of his omnipotent hand, endued with absolute perfection, and free from all evil, both natural and moral : to shew, that this was an ancient opinion, some lines are quoted from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, de-

cribing the Golden Age, in such a state of perfect happiness and innocence ; on which the author, thinking them to be no part of any one's creed, imagined himself at liberty to observe, that from the nature of man, and the nature of this terrestrial globe, which he inhabits, the real existence of such a state seemed impossible ; and therefore, that these descriptions of it could be nothing more than amusing dreams and enchanting fables. This bears not the least reference to the Mosaic account of Paradise, in which such a state of absolute perfection, void of all evil, is so far from being described, that the serpent, or the devil, the parent of all evil, is one of the principal characters of that history ; which therefore by no means contradicts the proposition here asserted.

The second letter undertakes to shew, that evils of imperfection are in truth no evils at all ; but only the absence of comparative good, resulting solely from the necessary inferiority of some beings with regard to others, which cannot be prevented in a system

tem of creation, whose very essence consists in a chain of subordination, descending from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. To this likewise one objection only has been made ; which is, that no such chain of subordinate beings, reaching from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, can, in fact, exist, for this notable reason ; because no being can approach next to infinite perfection nor any be contiguous to nothing. But this argument being no more than a quibble on metaphysical terms, to which no precise ideas are affixed, neither deserves, nor is capable of an answer.

The third letter treats of natural evils ; and attempts to shew, that most of these, which we complain of, are derived likewise from the same source ; that is, from the imperfection of our natures, and our station in the universal system : to this are added three conjectures ; first, that many of our miseries may be owing to some secret, but invincible disposition, in the nature of things, that renders it impracticable to produce pleasure exclusive of pain ; a certain degree of which

must therefore be endured by individuals, for the happiness and well-being of the whole: secondly, that many other of our miseries may be inflicted on us by the agency of superior beings, to whose benefit they may possibly be as conducive as the deaths and sufferings of inferior animals are to ours; and lastly, that by the ancient doctrine of transmigration, the miseries, which for the sake of general utility we are obliged to suffer in one life, may be recompensed in another, and so the divine goodness be sufficiently justified from the admission of them all. To every one of these some objections have been made: against the first, it has been alledged, that this impracticability to produce pleasure without pain, whence arises this utility of the sufferings of individuals for the good of the whole, is merely a production of the author's own daring imagination, founded on no reason, and supported by no proof. To which he answers, that he proposes it as a conjecture only; but cannot think it ill-founded, since it is confirmed

firmed by the appearance of every thing around us, and since it is reasonable to believe, that a benevolent Creator would not have permitted his creatures to have suffered on any other terms. In ridicule of the second conjecture, it has been asked, with an air of humour, whether we can think it credible that superior beings should ride, or hunt, or roast, or eat us, as we make use of inferior animals? Which question is most properly to be answered by another: whether, in the unbounded system of creation, there may not be numberless methods, by which beings of different orders may be subservient to each others uses, totally above the reach of our comprehensions? To doubt of which would be like the incredulity of the ignorant peasant, who can scarce be persuaded to believe that there is any thing in the world, some specimen of which he has not beheld within the narrow limits of his own parish. To the last it is objected, that the doctrine of transmigration being only the fanciful and exploded opinion of some ancient philosophers,

phers, in the times of darkneſs, ought not, by the author, to have been here advanced in direct contradiction to the faith and tenets of the Chriſtian religion : to which he replies, that he neither propoſes this doctrine as an article of his own belief, or impoſes it on others ; but mentions it only as the moſt rational conjecture of the human mind, uninformed by ſupernatural aſſiſtance, concerning a future ſtate ; that it is confirmed by Revelation he does not pretend, but that it directly contradicts it, by no means appears. So ſilent are the ſcriptures concerning the ſtate of the ſoul between death and the reſurrection, that the moſt learned divines ſtill widely differ on that ſubject ; ſome maintaining that it enters immediately into a ſtate of retribution ; others, of ſleep ; and others, of purgation from paſt offences : why therefore is it more repugnant to the ſenſe of theſe writings to ſuppoſe, that it may poſſibly animate other bodies during that period, and, at the laſt day, receive ſuch puniſhments or rewards as is due on the whole account of
its

its past behaviour? Thus the probability of every one of these conjectures seems to be sufficiently established, and they appear perfectly consistent with reason, and not at all contradictory to revelation.

The fourth letter endeavours to account for moral evil: the most arduous part of the whole undertaking; to which end it attempts to shew, that the common opinion, which derives it solely from the abuse of free-will in man, is ineffectual for that purpose; and that therefore, though its very essence consists in the production of natural evil, yet it could never have been admitted into the works of a just and beneficent Creator, if it had not some remote and collateral tendency to universal good, by answering some ends beneficial to the immense and incomprehensible whole; one of which may possibly be the conversion of unpreventable miseries into just punishments by the production of guilt, without which they must have been inflicted on perfect innocence. To this account of the origin of moral evil, not only many
weighty

weighty objections have been made, but on it many imputations have been laid of a most formidable nature, as that it makes God the cause of all wickedness, destroys free-will in man, and consequently roots up the foundation of all virtue and morality whatever ; and it is, moreover, charged with inconsistency and self-contradiction through every part. To all this the author replies only, that he is assured, that, if any intelligent reader will peruse the whole letter together with candor and attention, it will evidently appear that these accusations are entirely groundless. He makes no manner of doubt, but that man is endued with free-will, and is justly punishable for the abuse of it ; and hopes he has so expressed himself, through this whole piece, as to leave no uncertainty of his opinion on that question : all he means is, that though the abuse of free-will is undoubtedly the immediate cause of moral evil, yet it cannot from thence derive its original admission into the works of a benevolent Creator ; because man, not being

ing a self-existent and independent being, must receive that will itself, together with his nature and formation, from the supreme author of all things; for which reason he cannot apprehend, that the general wickedness of mankind can be an accident proceeding from their unforeseen wrong elections, by which the whole benevolent system is defeated; but must be a part, and a material part too, of the original plan of creation, wisely calculated by the incomprehensible operations of vice and punishment, to promote the good and happiness of the whole. For, to assert, that any thing has happened which God did not intend, or that he intended any thing which did not happen, is a language which may be allowed to the poet or the orator, but never to the philosopher; unless we can suppose, that omniscience can be disappointed, and omnipotence defeated. As to inconsistency, he denies not the charge; but believes he is not more inconsistent than all who have undertaken to write on the same subject: the scriptures

ſcriptures themſelves are guilty of the ſame ſeeming inconfiſtency on this head; they all repreſent man as a being perfectly free, puniſhable, and puniſhed for his miſbehaviour; yet as conſtantly ſpeak of him as a creature deriving all his thought, will, and diſpoſitions from his Creator, and under his perpetual influence and direction; the appearance of inconfiſtency, in which two propoſitions, both undoubtedly true, proceeds only from our ignorance in the nature and limits of free-will, and divine influence, and our inability to comprehend them. In the latter part of this letter a few hints are flung out, to ſhew that on the principles of the foregoing theory ſome of the moſt abſtruſe doctrines of the chriſtian revelation, of original ſin, grace, predeſtination, and vicarious puniſhment, might be rendered reconcilable to the ſtricteſt reaſon; a propoſal from whence ſurely much advantage might accrue to the cauſe of chriſtianity in general, and by which poſſibly ſome articles of our own church might be proved to be much

leſs

less incompatible with common sense than they are thought to be by all those who will not subscribe them, and by many who do: with this, two classes of men are particularly offended; the rational dissenters, as they please to call themselves, and the methodists: the former of these having arbitrarily expunged out of their bibles every thing which appears to them contradictory to reason, that is, to their own reason, or, in other words, every thing which they cannot understand, are displeased to see those tenets explained, which they have thought proper to reject: the latter, having embraced these very doctrines only because they appeared unintelligible, are unwilling to see them cleared up, and afraid lest those dark and thorny covers should be laid open, under which they have so long sheltered themselves from the rays of reason: with either of these all debate would be vain and useless; because the first, though for the most part honest, religious, and learned men, are unable to comprehend any reasoning, which soars
above

above the limits of their own confined literature and education ; and the others are determined to listen to no reasoning at all, having with all reason and common sense declared eternal warfare.

The design of the fifth letter is to shew, that in the government of such imperfect creatures as men over each other there must be much unavoidable evil ; that all human governments, whether of the monarchical, popular, or mixed kinds, were at first founded on force or interest, and must ever be supported by the same means, that is, by compulsion or corruption, both of which must be productive of innumerable evils ; that these ought not to be imputed to God, because he could not have prevented them without the total alteration of human nature ; much less can they be eradicated by men ; but that they may in some measure be lessened by the diminution of moral evil, from which all political evils are derived ; and therefore that we ought quietly to submit to these evils, when they do not arise to any intolerable

tolerable degree, and to apply principally that remedy to the faults of government, which is ever the most effectual, that is, the amendment of our own. It is no wonder, that a lesson so disagreeable to the restless humours of most men, and so repugnant to the arts and ends of faction, should call up against the author many opponents, who have liberally bestowed on him the titles of an enemy to liberty, and an advocate for corruption, with the same justice that a physician might be stiled an enemy to health, and an advocate for the gout, who in that distemper prescribes patience and temperance, rather than such inflaming medicines as might convert it into a more dangerous disease. All that he has asserted in this letter amounts to no more than this: that no government can subsist without some principle of governing; that is, that men cannot be governed without some means by which their obedience can be obtained; a proposition, which seems as incontestible, as that every effect must have a cause. That all

government must be disagreeable to those who are governed, is demonstrable from the nature and essence of government itself, which being nothing more than a compulsion of individuals to act in such a manner in support of society, as they are neither wise, nor honest enough to do from the suggestions of their own heads or hearts; this compulsion must be contrary to both their judgments and inclinations, and consequently disagreeable, and for that reason perpetually resisted: some method must therefore be made use of to overcome this resistance, and what that method can be, except force or interest, he cannot find out: he is an advocate for neither, except from their necessity; and, if any one will point out another, he will readily declare his disapprobation of them both.

The sixth and last letter proceeds upon the same plan as the rest, and endeavours to shew, that religious evils, that is, the defects so visible in all human religions, and the mischievous consequences resulting from them

them, are not owing to any want of wisdom or goodness in our Creator, but proceed, like all others, from our nature and situation, and the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature. In order to explain this, it was necessary to point out the particular imperfections, which in fact do exist in all human religions, whether natural or revealed; not with any design to depreciate the one, or to invalidate the authority of the other, but only to account for them consistently with God's wisdom and benevolence: those charged upon natural religion have been readily enough agreed to, but those imputed to revelation have offended many, who have from thence considered the whole of this enquiry as intended secretly to undermine the foundations of Christianity, than which nothing can be more averse from the intentions, as well as from the sentiments of the author; but indeed many late deistical writers have attacked that religion so unfairly, by insinuating many cavils, which they dared not ex-

preſs, that they have made it very difficult
 for any one to treat freely on that ſubject,
 without incurring the ſuſpicion of the ſame
 inſincerity : of all ſuch diſingenuous artifi-
 ces the author ſincerely declares his utmoſt de-
 teſtation, and begs to be underſtood to mean
 all that he expreſſes, and nothing more ; he
 ſolemnly profeſſes, that by recounting theſe
 imperfections, he is ſo far from entertaining
 any ſecret deſigns deſtructive to that ſacred
 institution, that by it he intended not only
 to wreſt out of the hands of infidelity thoſe
 weapons, with which it has ever been moſt
 ſucceſſfully aſſaulted, but alſo to obviate all
 thoſe doubts and difficulties which frequent-
 ly occur to the minds of thinking men,
 though no infidels, on viewing the deplora-
 ble ſtate in which all human religion has
 continued throughout all ages, and the in-
 effectual aſſiſtance it has received even from
 this divine interpoſition itſelf, by no means
 exempted from numberleſs evils and imper-
 fections : to thoſe, who perceive none of
 theſe imperfections, and conſequential evils,
 he

he means not to write, nor desires to let in any new light on their tender organs, which can serve only to disturb their present repose ; nor does he aspire to the honour of working for those middle-sized understandings, who can be well fitted with ready-made arguments from every pulpit : to the learned, impartial, sagacious, and inquisitive, he alone applies ; the establishing one of whom in a rational and well-grounded belief of the Christian Religion does more real service to that cause, than the enlisting legions under that denomination whose immoveable faith proceeds only from their ignorance ; that is, who believing without any reason, can possibly have no reason for doubting. To account for the corruption of religion, it was necessary to specify the particular abuses, and abusers of it ; and here the author could scarcely overlook the clergy ; but he hopes that nothing has escaped his pen, that can throw the least reflection upon them as clergy, but as men only, subject to the same imperfections, and actuated by the same

passions as other men, and pursuing the ends of self-interest and ambition by the same paths, in which all others would have trod, conducted by the same temptations and opportunities; he has treated them with no more freedom than he has done princes and parliaments, ministers and patriots, conquerors and heroes, and his work would admit of no partiality; sure he is, that nothing he has said can bear the most distant relation to the present clergy of this country, whom he sincerely thinks are a body of men as honest, learned, and unprejudiced, as ever existed, and for whose persons and profession he has the highest regard. In another part of this letter there is an assertion, which has given some offence; which is, that every religion must be corrupted as soon as it becomes established; this has been thought a reflection upon all national churches, and a persuasion to schism and dissention; but those who think thus, totally misapprehend the tenor of this whole work, which endeavours to prove that every thing human must be

be attended with evils, which therefore ought to be submitted to with patience and resignation; that many imperfections will adhere to all governments and religions in the hands of men, but that these, unless they rise to an intolerable degree, will not justify our resistance to the one, or our dissention from the other: the assertion itself, the author cannot retract, but the inference, which he desires may be drawn from it, is by no means favourable to dissentions, because from them he can perceive no remedy, which can accrue to these evils; for if it was every one's duty to desert a national church on account of those corruptions which proceed from its establishment, and this duty was universally complied with, let us see the consequence! one of these things must necessarily follow: either that some dissention of superior purity, which usually arises from its being a dissention, must be established in its room, or no religion must be established at all; if the first of these methods should take place, the end proposed by it would by

itself be entirely defeated; because that purer religion which was established, would by that very establishment become equally corrupt with that which was deserted; and so the same reason would eternally remain for a new dissention: if the latter should be taken, that is, to establish no religion at all; this would be so far from producing the intended reformation, that it would let in such an inundation of enthusiasm and contradictory absurdities, as must in a short time destroy not only all religion, but all peace and morality whatever; of which no one can entertain the least doubt, who is not totally unacquainted both with the nature and history of mankind. From whence it is plain, that all dissentions from a national church, not in itself sinful, arise from ignorance; that is, from a kind of short-sightedness, which enables men to pry out every imperfection within their reach, but prevents their discerning the more remote necessity for those imperfections, and the danger of amending them.

To

To conclude ; the author of this enquiry having heard it so much, and as he thought so unjustly calumniated, has reviewed it with all possible care and impartiality, and though he finds many things in the stile and composition, which have need enough of amendment, he sees nothing in the sentiments which ought to be retracted. His intentions were to reconcile the numerous evils so conspicuous in the creation, with the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator ; to shew, that no more of them are admitted by him, than are necessary towards promoting universal good ; and from thence to persuade men to an entire resignation to his all-wise, but incomprehensible dispensations. To ascertain the nature of virtue, and to enforce the practice of it ; to prove the certainty of a future state, and the justice of the rewards and punishments that will attend it ; to recommend submission to national governments, and conformity to national religions, notwithstanding the evils and defects, which must unavoidably adhere to them ; and lastly,

ly, to shew the excellence and credibility of the Christian revelation, to reconcile some of its most abstruse doctrines with reason, and to answer all those objections to its authority, which have been drawn from its imperfections and abuses; these, and these only, were the intentions of the author; and if, after all, a work so designed, however unably executed, should by the united force of ignorance and malevolence, of faction, bigotry, and enthusiasm, be represented as introductive of fatalism, immorality, slavery, corruption, and infidelity, he shall be little concerned, and shall only look upon it as an additional instance of that imperfection of mankind, which he has here treated of; from them he desires only an exemption from calumny; honour and applause he has not the vanity to hope for; these, he knows, they bestow not on their benefactors or instructors, but reserve for those alone who deceive, disturb, and destroy them.

L E T.

L E T T E R I.

ON EVIL IN GENERAL.

S I R,

HAVING enjoyed the pleasure of many accidental conferences with you on metaphysical, moral, political, and religious subjects ; on which you ever seemed to converse with more sagacity, as well as more candor, than is usual on the like occasions ; I imagined it might not be unentertaining either to you or myself, to put together my sentiments on these important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the absence of business, or of more agreeable amusements, may afford me opportunity. This I propose to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil ; an inquiry which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deserves,

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LET-

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deserves, nor with that success, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been bestowed upon it. The right understanding of this abstruse speculation, I look upon to be the only solid foundation, on which any rational system of ethicks can be built; for it seems impossible, that men should ever arrive at any just ideas of their Creator or his attributes, any proper notions of their relation to him, or their duty to each other, without first settling in their minds some satisfactory solution of this important question, *Whence came Evil?* Whilst we find ourselves liable to innumerable miseries in this life; apprehensive of still greater in another, and can give no probable account of this our wretched situation, what sentiments must we entertain of the justice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our solicitations or consent? The works of the Creation sufficiently demonstrate his existence; their beauty, perfection, and magnificence, his infinite power and wisdom; but it is the happiness only
 which

which we enjoy or hope for, which can convince us of his goodness.

It is the solution therefore of this important question alone, that can ascertain the moral characteristic of God, and upon that only must all human virtue eternally depend.

If there's a power above us,
(And that there is all Nature cries aloud
Thro' all her works) he must delight in virtue, ✓
And that which he delights in, must be happy.

But should this divine reasoning of the philosopher be at last inconclusive; could we once entertain such blasphemous notions of the Supreme Being, as that he might not delight in virtue, neither adhere to it himself, nor reward it in others; that he could make any part of his creation miserable, or suffer them to make themselves so without a just cause and a benevolent end, all moral considerations must be vain and useless; we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor if we had, any kind of obligation to pursue it; nor in this case can any revelation in the least assist us, the belief of all revelation
being

being in its own nature subsequent, not only to the belief of God's existence, but of his justice and veracity; for if God can injure us, he may also deceive us; and then there is an end of all distinctions between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and of all confidence in God and man.

I mean not by this to insinuate the least possibility of a doubt concerning the justice or goodness of our Creator, but only to shew the importance of this inquiry, and the utility of it towards settling our notions of his attributes, and the regulation of our own behaviour in conformity to them. I intend not by it to prove the benevolence of God, but to reconcile the miseries we see and suffer, with that incontrovertible benevolence; I design not to shew that God approves virtue, but that the admission of moral evil is not inconsistent with that undoubted approbation; nor would I be understood to assert, that our obligation to be virtuous depends on this abstruse speculation, but only that our right understanding it will remove all doubts

doubts concerning the nature of virtue, and our obligation to pursue it, and fix them on the most firm and immoveable basis.

To find out therefore how evil of any kind can be the production of infinite goodness, joined with infinite power, should be the first step in all our religious inquiries; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us into many useful and sublime truths; and its perfect comprehension, was that possible for our narrow capacities, would, I doubt not, make as surprising discoveries in the moral world, as mathematical and physical knowledge have in the natural.

To clear up this difficulty, some ancient philosophers have had recourse to the supposition of two first causes, one good, and the other evil, perpetually counteracting each other's designs. This system was afterwards adopted by the *Manichæan* heresy, and has since been defended by the ingenious *Monf. Bayle*: but as the supposition of two first causes is even in itself a contradiction,

and as the whole scheme has been demonstrated by the best metaphysical writers to be as false as it is impious, all further arguments to disprove it would be needless.

Others have endeavoured to account for this by the introduction of a golden age, or paradisiacal state, in which all was innocence and happiness.

*Pæna metusque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo
Ære legebantur, nec supplex turba timebant
Judicis ora sui: sed erant sine vindice tuti.*

When man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted reason knew,
And with a native bent did good pursue;
Unforc'd by punishment, unaw'd by fear,
His words were simple, and his soul sincere:
Needless was written law, when none oppress'd,
The law of man was written in his breast:
No suppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,
No court erected yet, nor cause was heard,
But all was safe, for conscience was their guard.

*Ver erat æternum, placidisque tepentibus auris
Mulcebant Zephyri natos sine semine flores;
Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,
Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat aristas,*

Flumina

*Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant,
Flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.*

The flow'rs unfown in fields and meadows reign'd,
And western winds immortal spring maintain'd.
In following years the bearded corn ensu'd
From earth unask'd, nor was that earth renew'd.
From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,
And honey sweated from the pores of oak.

Amusing dreams ! as absurd in philosophy,
as in poetry delightful ! For though it is
probable, from the most ancient histories, as
well as from analogy drawn from the rest
of Nature's productions, that the world
might be more happy and more innocent
in its infancy, than in more advanced ages ;
yet that it could ever be totally free from
vice and misery, may easily, I think, be
proved impossible, both from the nature of
this terrestrial globe, and the nature of its in-
habitants. So that these enchanting scenes
can in fact never have existed ; but if they
had, the short duration of this perfection is
equally inconsistent with infinite power, join-
ed to infinite wisdom and goodness, as any

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original imperfection whatever. Fables then of this kind can never in the least account for the origin of evil ; they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to take away the difficulty, and can at most but obscure it, by shifting it a little backward into a less clear light ; like that *Indian* philosophy, accounting for the support of the world, which informs us, that it is sustained by a vast elephant, and that elephant by a tortoise, and then prudently drops any further inquiry.

The divines and moralists of later ages seem perfectly satisfied that they have loosed this Gordian knot, by imputing the source of all evil to the abuse of free-will in created beings. God, they say, never designed any such thing should exist as evil, moral or natural ; but that giving to some beings, for good and wise purposes, a power of free-agency, they perverted this power to bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands ; and thus their accidental wickedness produced consequential misery. But

to suppose in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the same time gave being to creatures able and willing to obstruct his benevolent designs, is a notion so inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness, omniscience, and omnipotence, that it seems equally unphilosophical, and more evidently absurd than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculously judging of the dispensations of a Creator to his creatures, by the same rules which they apply to the dealings of men towards each other; between which there is not the least proportion or similitude. A man who endeavours, to the utmost of his power, to make others virtuous and happy, however unsuccessful, is sufficiently justified; but in a Being omnipotent and omniscient, the cause of all causes, the origin of all thought, will, and action; who sees all things past, present, and to come, in one instantaneous view, the case is widely different; his active and permissive will must be exactly the same; and, in regard to him, all consequen-

tial and future evils, through every moment of time, are actually present.

Since therefore none of these pretended solutions can, I am certain, give satisfaction to your comprehensive understanding, let us now try to find out one more rational and more consistent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That there is a Supreme Being infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent, the great Creator and Preserver of all things, is a truth so clearly demonstrated, that it shall here be taken for granted. That there is also in the universal system of things, the works of his almighty hand, much misery and wickedness, that is, much natural and moral evil, is another truth, of which every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How these two undoubted, yet seeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how evils of any sort could have place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we assert that he could not prevent them, we destroy
his

his power ; if that he would not, we arraign his goodness ; and therefore his power and goodness cannot both be infinite.

But however conclusive this argument may seem, there is somewhere or other an error in it ; and this error I take to arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all possible things. But so little are we acquainted with the whole system of nature, that we know not what are possible, and what are not ; but if we may judge from that constant mixture of pain with pleasure, and of inconvenience with advantage, which we must observe in every thing around us, we have reason to conclude, that to endue created beings with perfection, that is, to produce good exclusive of evil is one of those impossibilities which even infinite power cannot accomplish.

The true solution then of this incomprehensible paradox must be this, that all evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures ; by which I mean, they could not possibly have been prevented,

without the loss of some superior good, or the permission of some greater evil than themselves ; or that many evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves by the natural relations and circumstances of things, into the most perfect system of created beings, even in opposition to the will of an Almighty Creator, by reason they cannot be excluded without working contradictions ; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

And here it will be proper to make a previous apology for an expression, which will frequently occur in the following pages, which is, that God cannot do such and such things ; by which is always to be understood not any retrenchment of the divine omnipotence, but only that such things are in their own natures impracticable, and impossible to be performed.

That the Almighty should be thus limited, and circumscribed by the nature of things, of which he himself is the author, may to some seem not very intelligible ; but surely
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it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every possible method of ordering, disposing, and framing the universal system of things, such numberless inconveniences might necessarily arise, that all that infinite power and wisdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the least and fewest ; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator, but from that imperfection which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

This necessity, I imagine, is what the ancients meant by fate, to which they fancied that *Jupiter* and all the gods were obliged to submit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The *Stoicks* seem to have had some dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither understood themselves, nor knew how to explain to others ; that the untractableness of matter was the cause of evil ; that God would have made all things perfect, but that there was in matter an evil bias repugnant to his benevolence, which drew another way,

whence arose all manner of evils. Of the like kind is a maxim of the same philosophers, that pain is no evil ; which, if asserted with regard to the individuals who suffer it, is downright nonsense ; but if considered as it affects the universal system, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is necessary to the production of happiness. How many soever of these evils then force themselves into the creation, so long as the good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite wisdom and benevolence ; and notwithstanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is most undoubtedly perfect.

Hence then we may plainly see that much evil may exist, not at all inconsistent with the power and goodness of God ; and the further we pursue this clue, the more we shall, at every step, discern new lights break out, which will discover clearly numberless examples, where the infinite power and goodness of God is fairly reconcileable with the misery and wickedness of his creatures,

from

from the impossibility of preventing them; and if, in the very small part of the universal system that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many instances of this kind appear, in which they are visibly consistent, we ought, with the utmost assurance, to conclude what is undoubtedly true, that they are really so in all, though we are not able to comprehend them. This is the kind of faith most worthy of the human understanding, and most meritorious in the sight of God, as it is the offspring of reason, as well as the parent of all virtue and resignation to the just, but unscrutable dispensations of providence.

But in order more clearly to explain this abstruse speculation, it will be necessary to divide evils into their different species, and bestow on each a separate consideration. This I shall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, Moral Evils, Political Evils, and Religious Evils; which, I think, will comprehend most of those to which human nature is unhappily

happily liable. And now, Sir, lest I should add one more evil to this melancholy catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious epistle, I shall reserve the examination into each of these particulars for the subject of a future letter ; and conclude this, by assuring you that I am,

S I R, &c.

LET-

L E T T E R II.

ON EVILS OF IMPERFECTION.

S I R,

IN pursuance of the plan proposed in my last, I shall now proceed to examine into the nature of each particular kind of evil, and in the first place of those therein denominated evils of imperfection ; which are in truth no evils at all, but rather the absence of some comparative good ; and therefore I shall not have occasion to detain you long on this part of my subject.

No system can possibly be formed, even in imagination, without a subordination of parts. Every animal body must have different members subservient to each other ; every picture must be composed of various colours, and of light and shade ; all harmony must be formed of trebles, tenors, and basses ; every beautiful and useful edifice
must

must consist of higher and lower, more and less magnificent apartments. This is in the very essence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unless by not creating them at all: for which reason, in the formation of the universe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that just subordination so necessary to the very existence of the whole, to create beings of different ranks; and to bestow on various species of animals, and also on the individuals of the same species, various degrees of understanding, strength, beauty, and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakness, deformity, and imperfection, and very unjustly repute them evils; whereas in truth they are blessings as far as they extend, though of an inferior degree. They are no more actual evils, than a small estate is a real misfortune, because many may be possessed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more,

more, can never sure be deemed an injury, or a just reason to question his infinite benevolence. All our happiness is owing to his goodness; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourselves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happiness, or even to any existence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the person who has relieved him: that he had something, was owing to his benefactor; but that he had no more only to his original poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the good they see others enjoy, or think possible for infinite power to bestow, as positive evil, understand not that the universe is a system whose very essence consists in subordination; a scale of beings descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothing; in which, though we may justly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we possibly comprehend it; yet would it be the highest absurdity to hope for it in all its parts, because the beauty and happiness

ness of the whole depend altogether on the just inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the several beings of which it is composed.

It would have been no more an instance of God's wisdom to have created no beings but of the highest and most perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art to cover his whole piece with one single colour the most beautiful he could compose. Had he confined himself to such, nothing could have existed but demi-gods or arch-angels, and then all inferior orders must have been void and uninhabited: but as it is surely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all these should be filled up with beings capable of enjoying happiness themselves, and contributing to that of others, they must necessarily be filled with inferior beings, that is, with such as are less perfect, but from whose existence, notwithstanding that less perfection, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the universe, than if no such had been created. It is moreover highly probable, that there is such
a con-

a connection between all ranks and orders by subordinate degrees, that they mutually support each other's existence, and every one in its place is absolutely necessary towards sustaining the whole vast and magnificent fabric.

You see, therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power, to exclude from creation this necessary inferiority of some beings in comparison with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their respective situations will permit: and this it has done in so extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of; for though he cannot make all superior, yet in the dispensations of his blessings, his wisdom and goodness both are well worthy the highest admiration; for, amongst all the wide distinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his creatures, he has made much less in their happiness than is usually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances.

He has given many advantages to brutes, which man cannot attain to with all his superiority, and many probably to man which are denied to angels; amongst which his ignorance is perhaps none of the least. With regard to him, though it was necessary to the great purposes of human life to bestow riches, understanding, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions; yet has the Almighty so contrived the nature of things, that happiness is distributed with a more equal hand. His goodness, we may observe, is always striving with these our necessary imperfections, and setting bounds to the inconveniences it cannot totally prevent, by balancing the wants, and repaying the sufferings of all by some kind of equivalent naturally resulting from their particular situations and circumstances. Thus, for example, poverty or the want of riches is generally compensated by having more hopes and fewer fears, by a greater share of health, and a more exquisite relish of the smallest enjoyments than those who possess them are usually

ally blessed with. The want of taste and genius, with all the pleasures that arise from them, are commonly recompenced by a more useful kind of common-sense, together with a wonderful delight, as well as success, in the busy pursuits of a scrambling world. The sufferings of the sick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, sometimes almost repaid by the inconceivable transports occasioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, because imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is some truth in that rant of a mad poet, that there is a pleasure in being mad, which none but madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged

and improper education. It is the basis of all subordination, the support of society, and the privilege of individuals ; and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of the divine wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive ; in man, whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by education ; by which means the prince and the labourer, the philosopher and the peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations. The same parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberless anxieties, by that happy want of reflection on past, and apprehension of future sufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Those amongst them who devour others, are taught by nature to dispatch them as easily as possible ; and man, the most merciless devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feast those designed for his sustenance, the more luxuriously to feast upon them himself. Thus

misery, by all possible methods, is diminished or repaid ; and happiness, like fluids, is ever tending towards an equilibrium.

But was it ever so unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not so high in the scale of existence as our ignorant ambition may desire : a pretence which must eternally subsist ; because, were we ever so much higher, there would be still room for infinite power to exalt us ; and since no link in the chain can be broke, the same reason for disquiet must remain to those who succeed to that chasm, which must be occasioned by our pre-ferment. A man can have no reason to repine, that he is not an angel ; nor a horse, that he is not a man ; much less, that in their several stations they possess not the faculties of another ; for this would be an insufferable misfortune. And doubtless it would be as inconvenient for a man to be endued with the knowledge of an angel, as for a horse to have the reason of a man ;

but as they are now formed by the consummate wisdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleasures peculiar to his situation ; and though the happiness of one may perhaps consist in divine contemplation, of another in the acquisition of wealth and power, and that of a third in wandering amongst limpid streams, and luxuriant pastures ; yet the meanest of these enjoyments give no interruption to the most sublime, but altogether undoubtedly increase the aggregate sum of felicity bestowed upon the universe. Greatly indeed must that be lessened, were there no beings but of the highest orders. Did there not, for instance, exist on this terrestrial globe any sensitive creatures inferior to man, how great a quantity of happiness must have been lost, which is now enjoyed by millions, who at present inhabit every part of its surface, in fields and gardens, in extended deserts, impenetrable woods, and immense oceans ; by monarchies of bees, republics of ants, and innumerable families of insects dwelling on every leaf and flower,

flower, who are all possessed of as great a share of pleasure, and a greater of innocence, than their arrogant sovereign, and at the same time not a little contribute to his convenience and happiness.

Has God, thou fool ! work'd solely for thy good !
 Thy joy, thy pastime, thy attire, thy food !
 Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn,
 For him as kindly spreads the flow'ry lawn.
 Is it for thee the lark ascends and sings ?
 Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his wings.
 Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat ?
 Loves of his own, and raptures, swell the note.
 The bounding steed you pompously bestride,
 Shares with his lord the pleasure and the pride.
 Is thine alone the feed that strews the plain ?
 The birds of heav'n shall vindicate their grain.
 Thine the full harvest of the golden year ?
 Part pays, and justly, the deserving steer.

POPE.

Thus the universe resembles a large and well-regulated family, in which all the officers and servants, and even the domestic animals, are subservient to each other in a proper subordination : each enjoys the

privileges and perquisites peculiar to his place, and at the same time contributes by that just subordination to the magnificence and happiness of the whole.

It is evident, therefore, that these evils of imperfection, proceeding from the necessary inferiority of some beings in comparison of others, can in no sense be called any evils at all; but if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite power cannot prevent; it being sufficiently demonstrable, that to produce a system of created beings, all supreme in happiness and dignity, a government composed of all kings, an army of all generals, or an universe of all gods, must be impracticable for omnipotence itself.

We have here then made a large stride towards our intended goal, having at once acquitted the divine goodness, and freed mankind from a numerous train of imaginary evils, by most clearly shewing them to be no evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the evils we perpetually

tually complain of, except actual pain, the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good being, shall be considered in the next letter from,

S I R, &c.

E 4

LET-

LETTER III.

ON NATURAL EVILS.

S I R,

I Shall now lay before you my free sentiments concerning the origin of natural evils, by which I understand the sufferings of sensitive beings only; for tempests, inundations, and earthquakes, with all the disorders of the material world, are no farther evils than as they affect the sensitive; so that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That these are real evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philosopher enough to doubt of it, I shall only beg leave to refer him to a severe fit of sickness or a tedious law-suit, for farther satisfaction.

The production of happiness seems to be the only motive that could induce infinite goodness to exert infinite power to create all things;

things; for, to say truth, happiness is the only thing of real value in existence; neither riches, nor power, nor wisdom, nor learning, nor strength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itself, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All these are in themselves neither good nor evil; happiness alone is their great end, and they desirable only as they tend to promote it. Most astonishing therefore it must appear to every one who looks round him, to observe all creatures blessed with life and sensation, that is, all creatures made capable of happiness, at the same time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miseries. Whence can it proceed, that providence should thus seem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what strange and invisible cause are all these numerous and invincible evils indebted for their existence? If God is a good and benevolent being, what end could he propose from creation, but the propagation of happiness? and
if

if happiness is the end of all existence, why are not all creatures that do exist happy ?

The true solution of this important question, so long and so vainly searched for by the philosophers of all ages and all countries, I take to be at last no more than this, that these real evils proceed from the same source as those imaginary ones of imperfection before treated of, namely, from that subordination, without which no created system can subsist ; all subordination implying imperfection, all imperfection evil, and all evil some kind of inconvenience or suffering ; so that there must be particular inconveniences and sufferings annexed to every particular rank of created beings by the circumstances of things, and their modes of existence. Most of those to which we ourselves are liable may be easily shewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the station man occupies in the universe : and therefore their origin is plainly deducible from necessity ; that is, they could not have been prevented without the loss of greater good,

good, or the admission of greater evils than themselves ; or by not creating any such creatures as men at all. And though this upon a general view of things, does not so forcibly strike us ; yet, on a more minute inspection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will most evidently appear. Most of these, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads : poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death ; from none of which we may venture to affirm man could ever have been exempted so long as he continued to be man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite otherwise constituted ; but then we had been no longer men ; and whatever beings had occupied our stations in the universal system, they must have been liable to the same inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not possibly have been exempted from, not only by reason of the fluctuating nature of human possessions, but because the world
could

could not subsist without it ; for had all been rich, none could have submitted to the commands of another, or the drudgeries of life ; thence all governments must have been dissolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and so an universal penury have overwhelmed all, instead of now and then pinching a few. Hence, by the bye, appears the great excellence of charity, by which men are enabled, by a particular distribution of the blessings and enjoyments of life, on proper occasions, to prevent that poverty, which by a general one omnipotence itself could never have prevented : so that, by enforcing this duty, God as it were demands our assistance to promote universal happiness, and to shut out misery at every door, where it strives to intrude itself.

Labour, indeed, God might easily have excused us from, since at his command the earth would readily have poured forth all her treasures without our inconsiderable assistance ; but if the severest labour cannot sufficiently subdue the malignity of human nature,
what

what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devastation, what profligacy and licentiousness must have been the consequences of universal idleness ! So that labour ought only to be looked upon as a task kindly imposed upon us by our indulgent Creator, necessary to preserve our health, our safety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without first eradicating all our inclinations and passions, the winds and tides that preserve the great ocean of human life from perpetual stagnation. So long as men have pursuits, they must meet with disappointments ; and whilst they have disappointments they must be disquieted ; whilst they are injured, they must be inflamed with anger ; and whilst they see cruelties, they must be melted with pity ; whilst they perceive danger, they must be sensible of fear ; and whilst they behold beauty, they must be inflamed by love : nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on these various and turbulent passions. Yet without

out them we should be undoubtedly less happy and less safe ; for without anger we should not defend ourselves, and without pity we should not assist others ; without fear we should not preserve our lives ; and without love they would not be worth preserving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the necessary consequences of the union of material and spiritual essences ; for matter being by nature divisible, when endued with sensibility, must probably be affected by pains and pleasures by its different modifications : wherefore, to have been freed from our sufferings, we must have been deprived of all our sensual enjoyments ; a composition by which few surely would be gainers. Besides, the pains of our bodies are necessary to make us continually mindful of their preservation ; for what numberless lives would be lost in every trifling pursuit, or flung away in ill humour, was the piercing of a sword no more painful than the tickling of a feather.

Death, the last and most dreadful of all evils,

evils, is so far from being one, that it is the infallible cure for all others.

To die is landing on some silent shore,
Where billows never beat, nor tempests roar ;
Ere well we feel the friendly stroke 'tis o'er.

GARTH.

For, abstracted from the sickness and sufferings usually attending it, it is no more than the expiration of that term of life God was pleased to bestow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an evil ever so great, it could not be remedied but by one much greater, which is by living for ever ; by which means our wickedness, unrestrained by the prospect of a future state, would grow so insupportable, our sufferings so intolerable by perseverance, and our pleasures so tiresome by repetition, that no being in the universe could be so completely miserable as a species of immortal men. We have no reason therefore to look upon death as an evil, or to fear it as a punishment, even without any supposition of a future life ; but if we consider

sider it as a passage to a more perfect state, or a remove only in an eternal succession of still improving states (for which we have the strongest reasons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man must be as absurd to repine at dying, as a traveller would be, who proposed to himself a delightful tour through various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his residence at the first dirty inn which he baits at on the road. The instability of human life, or the hasty changes of its successive periods, of which we so frequently complain, are no more than the necessary progress of it to this necessary conclusion; and are so far from being evils deserving these complaints, that they are the source of our greatest pleasures, as they are the source of all novelty, from which our greatest pleasures are ever derived. The continual succession of seasons in the human life, by daily presenting to us new scenes, render it agreeable, and, like those of the year, afford us delights by their change, which

which the choicest of them could not give us by their continuance. In the spring of life, the gilding of the sun-shine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the sky, are so exquisite in the eyes of infants at their first looking abroad into a new world, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour of the succeeding summer of youth ripens for us new pleasures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace. The serene autumn of compleat manhood feasts us with the golden harvests of our wordly pursuits : nor is the hoary winter of old age destitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which the recollection and relation of those past are perhaps none of the least ; and at last death opens to us a new prospect, from whence we shall probably look back upon the diversions and occupations of this world with the same contempt we do now on our tops and hobby-horses, and with the same surprise, that they could ever so much entertain or engage us.

Thus we see all these evils could never

have been prevented even by infinite power, without the introduction of greater, or the loss of superior good; they are but the necessary consequences of human nature; from which it can no more be divested than matter from extension, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their existence.

If it be objected, that, after all that has been said, there are innumerable miseries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on man; many diseases of the body and afflictions of mind, in which nature seems to play the tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot avoid seeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miseries, some expiring on racks, others roasting in flames, some starving in dungeons, others raving in mad-houses, some broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquisite tortures of gout and stone: If it be said further, that some men being

exempted from many calamities with which others are afflicted, proves plainly that all might have been exempted from all; the charge can by no means be disputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite power could not have prevented most of these dreadful calamities. From hence, therefore, I am persuaded, that there is something in the abstract nature of pain conducive to pleasure; that the sufferings of individuals are absolutely necessary to universal happiness; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for omnipotence to produce the one, without at the same time permitting the other. Their constant and uniform concomitancy through every part of nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which scarce one instance, I believe, can be produced of the acquisition of pleasure or convenience by any creatures, which is not purchased by the previous or consequential sufferings of themselves or others; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of pain must be

cast into the universal mass of created happiness, and inflicted somewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of slain is every mighty empire rolled up to the summit of prosperity and luxury, and what new scenes of desolation attend its fall? To what infinite toil of men, and other animals, is every flourishing city indebted for all the conveniences and enjoyments of life, and what vice and misery do those very enjoyments introduce? The pleasures peculiar to the continuing our species are severely paid for by pains and perils in one sex, and by cares and anxieties in both. Those annexed to the preservation of ourselves are both preceded and followed by numberless sufferings; preceded by the massacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feast, and followed by as many diseases lying in wait in every dish to pour forth vengeance on their destroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our sports are pursued with scarce less fatigue or danger, and

and usually attended with distresses and destruction of innocent animals. This universal connection of pain with pleasure seems, I think, strongly to intimate, that pain abstractedly considered must have its uses; and since we may be assured, that it is never admitted but with the reluctance of the supreme author, those uses must be of the highest importance, though we have no faculties to conceive them.

The human mind can comprehend but a very small part of the great and astonishing whole; for any thing we know, the sufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing those sufferings) of the inhabitants of this terrestrial globe may some way or other affect those of the most distant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by some principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and so the miseries of particular beings be some way necessary to the happiness of the whole. How these things operate, is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in some

such extensive manner is far, I think, from improbable.

All ages and nations seem to have had confused notions of the merits of sufferings abstracted from their tendency to any visible good, and have paid the highest honours to those who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common benefactors. Many in christian countries have formerly been fainted for long fasting, for whipping or tormenting themselves, for sitting whole years in uneasy postures, or exposing themselves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the East are almost deified for loading themselves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themselves in chairs stuck round with pointed nails. Now, if these notions are not totally devoid of all reason and common sense, (and few, I believe, are so which become universal) they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the necessity of pain to produce happiness, which seems another weighty instance of the probability
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of this ancient and universal opinion, though the reasons for it are forgot or unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the most absurd and ridiculous superstitions.

One cause, I think, from which many of our severest sufferings may be derived, may be discovered by analogical reasoning, that is, by assimilating those things which are not objects of our understandings to others which lie within their reach. Man is one link of that vast chain, descending by insensible degrees, from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. As there are many thousands below him, so must there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we see innumerable species of inferior beings, whose happiness and lives are dependent on his will; we see him cloathed by their spoils, and fed by their miseries and destruction, enslaving some, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diversion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happiness and life of man should be equally dependent on the

wills of his superiors? As we receive great part of our pleasures, and even subsistence, from the sufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not these superior beings do the same from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the most exalted human understandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meanest creatures destined for our service? The fundamental error in all our reasonings on this subject, is that of placing ourselves wrong in that presumptuous climax of beast, man, and God; from whence, as we suppose falsely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we foolishly conclude that all the evils we labour under must be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand: whereas there may be numberless intermediate beings who have power to deceive, torment, or destroy us, for the ends only of their own pleasure or utility, who may be vested with the same privileges over their inferiors, and as much benefited by the use of them, as ourselves. In what manner these

these benefits accrue to them, it is impossible for us to conceive ; but that impossibility lessens not the probability of this conjecture, which by analogy is so strongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading some of those sublime authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of human nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you absurd and incredible, because inconsistent with that imaginary dignity ; and you may object, that it is impossible that God should suffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reason thus deceived : that though he may permit animals made solely for the use of man to be thus abused for his convenience or recreation, yet that man himself, the sole possessor of reason, the lord of this terrestrial globe, his own ambassador, vicegerent, and similitude, should be thus dependent on the will of others, must be utterly inconsistent with the divine wisdom and justice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a man to himself ? Is not the
justice

justice of God as much concerned to preserve the happiness of the meanest insect which he has called into being, as of the greatest man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we see made subservient to each others uses? and what is there in man, that he only should be exempted from this common fate of all created being? The superiority of man to that of other terrestrial animals is as inconsiderable, in proportion to the immense plan of universal existence, as the difference of climate between the north and south end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and distance of the sun. There is nothing leads us into so many errors concerning the works and designs of providence, as that foolish vanity that can persuade such insignificant creatures that all things were made for their service; from whence they ridiculously set up utility to themselves as the standard of good, and conclude every thing to be evil which appears injurious to them or their purposes. As well might a nest of ants imagine this globe of earth created only for them

them to cast up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their sustenance; then accuse their Creator for permitting spades to destroy them, and ploughs to lay waste their habitations; the inconveniences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to comprehend their uses, as well as the relations they themselves bear to superior beings.

It is surprising that none of those philosophers, who were drove to the supposition of two first causes, and many other absurdities, to account for the origin of evil, should not rather have chosen to impute it to the ministration of intermediate beings; and when they saw the happiness of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, should not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the universe might require that ours should be as dependant on the wills of superior beings, accountable like ourselves to one common lord and father of all things. This is the more wonderful, because the existence and influence of such beings has been

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an article in the creed of all religions that have ever appeared in the world. In the beautiful system of the pagan theology, their silvan and household deities, their nymphs, satyrs, and fawns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been discovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate spiritual beings, both good and evil. The Jewish religion not only confirms the belief of their existence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole system of christianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you see the good order of the whole, and the happiness it receives from a proper subordination, will sufficiently account for the sufferings of individuals; and all such should be considered but as the necessary taxes, which every member of this great republic of the universe is obliged to pay towards the support of the community. It is no derogation from the divine goodness, that these taxes are not always imposed equally in
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the present state of things ; because as every individual is but a part of the great whole, so is the present state but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal succession of others ; and, like a single day in the natural life, has reference to many more both past and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous account, from which no judgment can be formed on the state of the whole ; but of this we may be assured, that the balance will some time or other be settled with justice and impartiality. The certainty, therefore, of a future state, in which we, and indeed all creatures endued with sensation, shall somehow or other exist, seems (if all our notions of justice are not erroneous) as demonstrable as the justice of their Creator ; for if he is just, all such creatures must have their account of happiness and misery somewhere adjusted with equity, and all creatures capable of virtue and vice must, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and punishments ; and, to render these punishments consistent with infinite goodness, they must.

must not only be proportioned to their crimes, but also some way necessary to universal good ; for no creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wise and benevolent Creator, to be losers by their existence, or to be made miserable for no beneficial end, even by their own misbehaviour : so that all future misery, as well as present, must be subservient to happiness, or otherwise infinite power, joined with infinite goodness, would have prevented both vice and punishment.

For this reason, amongst all the short-sighted conjectures of man into the dispensations of providence and a future state, the ancient doctrine of transmigration seems the most rational and most consistent with his wisdom and goodness ; as by it all the unequal dispensations of things so necessary in one life, may be set right in another, and all creatures serve the highest and lowest, the most eligible and most burthensome offices of life by an equitable kind of rotation ; by which means their rewards and punishments
may

may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but also subservient towards carrying on the business of the universe, and thus at the same time answer the purposes of both justice and utility. But the pride of man will not suffer us to treat this subject with the seriousness it deserves; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every supposition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the same time the probability of human nature being exalted to the angelic, a much wider and more extraordinary transition, but yet such a one as may probably be the natural consequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life; nor is it less likely that our vices may debase us to the servile condition of inferior animals, in whose forms we may be severely punished for the injuries we have done to mankind when amongst them, and be obliged in some measure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically imposed upon us for their service.

From what has been said, I think, it
plainly

plainly appears that numberless evils do actually exist, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodness even by infinite power ; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none which could ; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all possible happiness, and, as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all misery, that is, all natural evil, from the universal system ; which notwithstanding will introduce itself in many circumstances, even in opposition to infinite power.

The origin of moral evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to assert has never yet been fathomed by the short line of human understanding. That I shall be able to reach it, I have by no means the vanity to imagine ; but, laying aside all pre-conceived opinions and systematical prejudice, I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the power of,

S I R, &c.

L E T.

L E T T E R IV.

ON MORAL EVIL.

S I R,

I Must now leave that plain and easy road through which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you through unfrequented paths, and ways untrodden by philosophic feet. Already, I think, the existence of natural evil has been sufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wisdom, or goodness of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the origin of moral evil; which, consistently with the same divine attributes, I have never seen accounted for by any author ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable satisfaction to a rational enquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the same time taking into consideration all those most abstruse speculations

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concerning

concerning the nature of virtue, free-will, fate, grace, and predestination, the debates of ages, and matter of innumerable folio's. To attempt this, therefore, in the compass of a letter would be the highest presumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehension of the person to whom it is addressed; and also that the most difficult of these kinds of disquisitions are usually better explained in a few lines, than by a thousand pages.

In order, therefore, to find out the true origin of moral evil, it will be necessary, in the first place, to enquire into its nature and essence; or what it is that constitutes one action evil, and another good. Various have been the opinions of various authors on this criterion of virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which must otherwise have been clear and manifest to the meanest capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any such thing, because different ages and nations have entertained different sentiments concerning it: but this is just as
reasonable

reasonable as to assert, that there are neither sun, moon, or stars, because astronomers have supported different systems of the motions and magnitudes of these celestial bodies. Some have placed it in conformity to truth, some to the fitness of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely superficial: they resolve us not why truth, or the fitness of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God should require us to act in one manner rather than another. The true reason of which can possibly be no other than this, because some actions produce happiness, and others misery; so that all moral good and evil are nothing more than the production of the natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falsehood, this that determines the fitness of things, and this that induces God to command some actions and forbid others. They who extol the truth, beauty, and harmony of virtue, exclusive of its consequences, deal but in pompous nonsense; and they who would persuade us, that good and evil are things

indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himself, by representing him capable of willing contradictions ; that is, that we should be, and be happy, and at the same time that we should torment and destroy each other ; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleasure, and consequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the consequences therefore of all human actions that must stamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce good, and introduce happiness into the world, so far we may pronounce it virtuous ; so much evil as it occasions, such is the degree of vice it contains. I say the general practice, because we must always remember, in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general species of actions, and not to particular actions ; for the infinite wisdom of God, desirous to set bounds to the destructive consequences which must otherwise have followed from the
universal

universal depravity of mankind, has so wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our most vicious actions may sometimes accidentally and collaterally produce good. Thus, for instance, robbery may disperse useless hoards to the benefit of the public; adultery may bring heirs, and good humour too, into many families, where they would otherwise have been wanting; and murder free the world from tyrants and oppressors. Luxury maintains its thousands, and vanity its ten thousands. Superstition and arbitrary power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preserved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, selfishness, and ambition: and thus the worst of vices, and the worst of men, are often compelled by providence to serve the most beneficial purposes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations; and thus private vices become public benefits by the force only of accidental circumstances. But this impeaches not the truth of the criterion of virtue before men-

tioned, the only solid foundation on which any true system of ethicks can be built, the only plain, simple, and uniform rule by which we can pass any judgment on our actions; but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good and which are evil, but almost mathematically to demonstrate the proportion of virtue or vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happiness or misery which they occasion. But though the production of happiness is the essence of virtue, it is by no means the end: the great end is the probation of mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themselves in another state by their behaviour in the present. And thus indeed it answers two most important purposes; those are, the conservation of our happiness and the test of our obedience: for had not such a test seemed necessary to God's infinite wisdom, and productive of universal good, he would never have permitted the happiness of men, even in this life, to have depended

depended on so precarious a tenure as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is observable, that he who best knows our formation, has trusted no one thing of importance to our reason or virtue : he trusts only to our appetites for the support of the individual, and the continuance of our species ; to our vanity, or compassion, for our bounty to others ; and to our fears for the preservation of ourselves ; often to our vices for the support of government, and sometimes to our follies for the preservation of our religion. But since some test of our obedience was necessary, nothing sure could have been commanded for that end so fit and proper, and at the same time so useful, as the practice of virtue ; nothing have been so justly rewarded with happiness, as the production of happiness in conformity to the will of God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and constitutes the essential difference between morality and religion. Morality obliges men to live honestly and soberly, because such behaviour

is most conducive to public happiness, and consequently to their own ; religion, to pursue the same course, because conformable to the will of their Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential considerations ; religion, from those of gratitude and obedience. Morality, therefore, entirely abstracted from religion, can have nothing meritorious in it ; it being but wisdom, prudence, or good œconomy, which like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him ; for though we may be justly punished for injuring ourselves, we can claim no reward for self-preservation ; as suicide deserves punishment and infamy, but a man deserves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all those passages in our scriptures, in which works are represented to have no merit without faith ; that is, not without believing in historical facts, in creeds, and articles ; but without being done in pursuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands.

commands *. And now, having mentioned scripture, I cannot omit observing, that the christian is the only religious or moral institution in the world that ever set in a right light these two material points, the essence and the end of virtue; that ever founded the one in the production of happiness, that is, in universal benevolence, or, in their lan-

* What was that faith which the author of the christian religion indispensably required in all his disciples? It could not be a literal and implicit belief of the divine inspiration of all the books of the Old Testament; and consequently of all the history, chronology, geography, and philosophy contained in them; Because to these the Jews, who rejected it, adhered with the most superstitious exactness: it could not be the same kind of belief in the writings of the New Testament, because these in his life-time had no existence; much less could it consist in a blind assent to the numberless explanations of these books, and least of all in the belief of creeds, articles, and theological systems founded on such explanations; for all these were the productions of later ages. It must therefore have been this, and this alone; a sincere belief in the divine authority of his mission, and a constant practice of all moral duties from a sense of their being agreeable to his commands.

guage,

guage, charity to all men ; the other, in the probation of man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philosophy of the ancients, all their moral systems were deficient in these two important articles. They were all built on the sandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthusiastic patriotism ; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory ; foundations which were by no means able to support the magnificent structures which they erected upon them ; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonsense ; patriotism, which injures mankind in general for the sake of a particular country, is but a more extended selfishness, and really criminal ; and all human glory but a mean and ridiculous delusion. The whole affair then of religion and morality, the subject of so many thousand volumes, is in short no more than this : the Supreme Being, infinitely good as well as powerful, desirous to diffuse happiness by all possible means, has created innumerable

merable ranks and orders of beings, all subservient to each other by proper subordination. One of these is occupied by man, a creature endued with such a certain degree of knowledge, reason, and free-will, as is suitable to his situation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a school of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debasing his nature, in such a manner as to render himself fit for a rank of higher perfection and happiness, or to degrade himself to a state of greater imperfection and misery; necessary indeed towards carrying on the business of the universe, but very grievous and burthensome to those individuals, who, by their own misconduct, are obliged to submit to it. The test of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, co-operating with his Creator, as far as his narrow sphere of action will permit, in the production of happiness. And thus the happiness and misery of a future state will be the just reward or punishment of promoting or preventing happiness in

in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and punishments are woven as it were into their very essence; their immediate effects give us a foretaste of their future; and their fruits in the present life are the proper samples of what they must unavoidably produce in another. We have reason given us to distinguish these consequences, and regulate our conduct; and lest that should neglect its post, conscience is also appointed as an instinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our interest and our duty.

When we consider how wonderfully the practice of virtue is thus enforced by our great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be happy, that is, to make each other so; and when at the same time we look round us, and see the whole race of mankind, through every successive generation, tormenting, injuring, and destroying each other, and perpetually counteracting the gracious designs of their maker,

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it is a most astonishing paradox how all this comes to pass ; why God should suffer himself to be thus defeated in his best purposes by creatures of his own making ; or why man should be made with dispositions to defeat them at the expence of his own present and future happiness ; why infinite goodness should form creatures inclined to oppose its own benevolent designs, or why infinite power should thus suffer itself to be opposed.

There are some, I know, who extricate themselves from this difficulty very concisely by asserting, that there is in fact no such original depravity, no such innate propensity to vice in human nature ; but as this assertion is directly contrary to the express declaration of the scriptures, to the opinion of the philosophers and moralists of all ages, and to the most constant and unvariable experience of every hour, I think they no more deserve an answer, than they who would affirm, that a stone has no tendency to the center by its
natural

natural gravity, or that flame has no inclination to ascend.

But the usual solution applied to this difficulty by the ablest philosophers and divines, with which they themselves, and most of their readers, seem perfectly satisfied, is comprehended in the following reasoning: That man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in virtue and happiness; but it being more eligible that he should be a free agent than a mere machine, God endued him with freedom of will; from the abuse of which freedom, all misery and sin, that is, all natural and moral evils, derive their existence; from all such therefore the divine goodness is sufficiently justified, by reason they could not be prevented without the loss of superior good; for to create men free, and at the same time compel them to be virtuous, is utterly impossible.

But whatever air of demonstration this argument may assume, by whatever famed preachers it may have been used, or by
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whatever learned audiences it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is false in all its principles, and in its conclusion also ; and I think it may be clearly shewn, that God did not make man absolutely perfect, nor absolutely free : nor, if he had, would this in the least have justified the introduction of wickedness and misery.

That man came perfect, that is, endued with all possible perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a false notion derived from the philosophers of the first ages, founded on their ignorance of the origin of evil, and inability to account for it on any other hypothesis: they understood not that the universal system required subordination, and consequently comparative imperfections ; nor that in the scale of beings there must be somewhere such a creature as man with all his infirmities about him ; that the total removal of these would be altering his very nature ; and that as soon as he became perfect he must cease to be man. The truth of this, I think, has been

sufficiently proved; and besides, the very supposition of a being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering itself wicked and miserable, is undoubtedly a contradiction, that very power being the highest imperfection imaginable.

That God made man perfectly free is no less false: men have certainly such a degree of free-will as to make them accountable, and justly punishable for the abuse of it; but absolute and independent free-will is what, I believe, no created being can be possessed of. Our actions proceed from our wills, but our wills must be derived from the natural dispositions implanted in us by the author of our being: wrong elections proceed from wrong apprehensions or unruly passions; and these from our original frame or accidental education; these must determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently, these previous circumstances continuing exactly the same. Had God thought proper to have made all men with the same heads and the same hearts,
which

which he has given to the most virtuous of the species, they would all have excelled in the same virtues : or had the bias implanted in human nature drawn as strongly towards the good side, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as successfully, and with as little infringement on human liberty : men, as well as all other animals, are exactly fitted for the purposes they are designed for ; and have inclinations and dispositions given them accordingly : He who implanted patience in the lamb, obedience in the horse, fidelity in the dog, and innocence in the dove, might as easily have inspired the breast of man with these and all other virtues ; and then his actions would have certainly corresponded with his formation : therefore, in the strict philosophical sense, we have certainly no free-will ; that is, none independent of our frame, our natures, and the author of them.

But were both these propositions true, were men originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means justify the

introduction of moral evil ; because, if his perfection was immediately to be destroyed by his free-will, he might as well never have been possesst of the one, and much better have been prevented from making use of the other : let us dispute therefore as long as we please, it must eternally be the same thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge, created beings originally wicked and miserable, or gave them a power to make themselves so, fore-knowing they would employ that power to their own destruction.

If moral evil, therefore, cannot be derived from the abuse of free-will in man, from whence can we trace its origin ? Can it proceed from a just, a wise, and a benevolent God ? Can such a God form creatures with dispositions to do evil, and then punish them for acting in conformity to those evil dispositions ? Strange and astonishing indeed must this appear to us, who know so little of the universal plan ! but it is far, I think, from being irreconcilable with the

justice of the Supreme disposer of all things : for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our first great proposition, (and most certainly true it is) that natural evils exist from some necessity in the nature of things, which no power can dispense with or prevent, the expediency of moral evil will, perhaps, follow on course : for if misery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, these miseries must be endured by some creatures or other for the good of the whole : and if there were none capable of wickedness, then they must fall to the share of those who are perfectly innocent. Here again we see our difficulties arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with : in the present instance it is obliged either to afflict innocence, or be the cause of wickedness ; it has plainly no other option : what then could infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness do in this situation more consistent with itself, than to call into being creatures formed with such depravity,

in their dispositions, as to induce many of them to act in such a manner as to render themselves proper subjects for such necessary sufferings, and yet at the same time endowed with such a degree * of reason and

* Some have asserted that there can be no degrees of free-will, but that every being must be absolutely free, or possessed of no freedom at all : and this seems to have been the principal error that has led those who have supported both sides of this question into so many absurdities ; as it well might, since they were both equally wrong in espousing a proposition, which contradicts both reason and experience. Brutes have a certain degree of free-will ; else why do we correct them for their misbehaviour, or why do they amend upon correction ? Yet certainly they have not so great a degree as ourselves. A man raving mad is not, nor is considered as a free-agent ; a man less mad has a greater portion of freedom ; and a man not mad at all has the greatest ; but still the degree of his freedom must bear a proportion to the weakness of his understanding, and the strength of his passions and prejudices ; all which are a perversion of reason, and madness as far as they extend, and operate on free-will in the very same manner : so that it is so far from being true, that all men are equally free, that probably there are no two men who are possessed of exactly the same degree of freedom.

free-will

free-will as to put it in the power of every individual to escape them by their good behaviour: such a creature is man; so corrupt, base, cruel, and wicked, as to convert these unavoidable miseries into just punishments, and at the same time so sensible of his own depravity and the fatal consequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one, and to avoid the other. Here we see a substantial reason for the depravity of man, and the admittance of moral evil in these circumstances seems not only compatible with the justice of God, but one of the highest instances of his consummate wisdom in ordering and disposing all things in the best manner their imperfect natures will admit.

I presume not by what has been here said to determine on the counsels of the Almighty, to triumph in the compleat discovery of the origin of moral evil, or to assert that this is the certain or sole cause of its existence; I propose it only as a guess concerning the reason of its admission, more probable, and less derogatory from the di-

vine wisdom and justice, than any that has hitherto been offered for that purpose.

There is undoubtedly something farther in the general depravity of mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wise ends are answered by it to us totally incomprehensible. God, as has been shewn, would never have permitted the existence of natural evil, but from the impossibility of preventing it without the loss of superior good; and on the same principle the admission of moral evil is equally consistent with the divine goodness: and who is he so knowing in the whole stupendous system of nature as to assert, that the wickedness of some beings may not, by means unconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown orders of others? or that the punishments of some may not contribute to the felicity of numbers infinitely superior?

To this purpose the learned Hugenius says with great sagacity, *Præterea credibile est, ipsa illa animi vitia magnæ hominum parti, non sine summo concilio data esse: Cum enim*
Dei

*Dei providentiâ talis sit Tellus, ejusque incolæ, quales cernimus, absurdum enim foret existimare omnia hæc alia facta esse, quam ille voluerit, sciveritque futura *.*

But let us not forget that this necessity of vice and punishment, and its subserviency to public good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to man ; for though the wisdom of God may extract from the wickedness of men some remote benefits to the universe ; yet that alters not the case with regard to them, nor in the least extenuates their guilt. He has given them reason sufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are displeasing to him, and free-will sufficient to refrain from such actions, and may therefore punish their disobedience without any infringement of justice : he knows indeed, that though none are under any compulsion to do evil, yet that they are all so framed, that many will certainly do it ; and he knows also that incomprehensible se-

* Cosmotheoros, Lib. 1. p. 34.

cret why it is necessary that many should : but his knowledge having no relation to their determinations renders not their vices less criminal, nor the punishment of them less equitable : for though with regard to God, vice may be perhaps the consequence of misery ; that is, men may be inclined to vice in order to render them proper objects of such a degree of misery as was unavoidably necessary, and previously determined for the sake of public good, yet, in regard to man, misery is the consequence of vice ; that is, all human vices produce misery, and are justly punished by its infliction.

If it be objected, that this makes God the author of sin, I answer, God is, and must be the author of every thing ; and to say that any thing is, or happens, independent of the first cause, is to say that something exists, or happens, without any cause at all. God is the author, if it may be so expressed, of all the natural evils in the universe ; that is, of the fewest possible in the nature of things ; and why may he not be the author of all
moral

moral evil in the same manner, and on the same principle? If natural evil owes its existence to necessity, why may not moral? If misery brings with it its utility, why may not wickedness?

“ If storms and earthquakes break not Heav’n’s
design,

“ Why then a Borgia or a Cataline?”

Wherefore it ought always to be considered, that, though sin in us, who see no farther than the evils it produces, is evil, and justly punishable; yet in God, who sees the causes and connections of all things, and the necessity of its admission, that admission may be no evil at all, and that necessity a sufficient vindication of his goodness.

But it may be alledged that this principle totally changes the nature of vice, destroys the criterion before affixed to it, and encourages the universal practice of wickedness: for if moral evil, and the punishment of it, are necessary towards promoting universal
good,

good, then the more wicked men are, the more they promote that good; and the more they co-operate with their Creator in compleating his great and benevolent plan of universal happiness. But this reasoning is extremely fallacious; because no collateral, remote, unknown, and undesigned good resulting from vice can alter the nature of it, or divest it of criminality; and moreover if that good arises only from its punishment, so far is it from an encouragement to wickedness, that it proves only that the punishment of it is necessary and unpreventable; nay in its nature incapable of remission, without a penal satisfaction from some being or other; nor does its co-operation with the designs of Providence render it less criminal, or less worthy of his just indignation: all histories are filled with instances of the wickedness of men conspiring to bring about the counsels of the Almighty; such were the ambition and ferocity of the Romans, the obstinacy of the Jews, the cruelty
of

of Herod, and the treachery of Judas ; yet were these never esteemed for that reason meritorious or innocent.

From this important proposition, that all natural evil derives its existence from necessity, and all moral from expediency arising from that necessity ; I say, from this important proposition, well considered and pursued, such new lights might be struck out as could not fail, if directed by the hands of learning and impartiality, to lead the human mind through the unknown regions of speculation, and to produce the most surprising and useful discoveries in ethics, metaphysics, and in christianity too : I add christianity, because it is a master-key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the mysterious and perplexing doctrines of that amazing institution, and explain fairly, without the least assistance from theological artifice, all those abstruse speculations of original sin, grace, and predestination, and vicarious punishments, which the most learned, for want of
this

this clue, have never yet been able to make consistent with reason or common sense.

In the first place, for instance, the doctrine * of original sin is really nothing more than the very system here laid down, into which we have been led by closely pursuing reason, and without which the origin of moral evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever. Indeed, according to the common notions of the absolute omnipotence of God, and the absolute free-will in man, it is most absurd and impious, as it represents the Deity voluntarily bringing men into being with depraved dispositions, tending to no good purposes, and then arbitrarily punishing them for the sins which they occasion with torments which answer no

* Original sin is a contradiction in terms ; original signifying innate, and sin the act of an accountable being : by this expression, therefore, of original sin cannot be meant original or innate guilt, for that is absolute nonsense, but only an original depravity, or an innate disposition to sin.

ends,

ends, either of their reformation or utility to the universe : but when we see, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the necessity of natural evils to admit moral, all these absurdities at once vanish, and the original depravity of man appears fairly consistent with the justice and even goodness of his Creator.

The doctrines of predestination and grace as set forth in the scriptures, on the most impartial interpretation, I take to be these : that some men come into the world with dispositions so extremely bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes, and in consequence be punished for them ; that to others he has given better dispositions, and moreover protects them from vice by a powerful but invisible influence, in the language of those writings called grace : this scheme has appeared to many so partial and unjust, that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite
out

out of the bible, in contradiction to all the sense of language, and the whole tenour of those writings : and indeed, on the old plan of God's absolute omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous necessity, in the nature of things, to admit both natural and moral evil, it is highly derogatory from his wisdom and goodness ; but, on the supposition of that previous necessity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the least inconsistent with divine justice ; because if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to suffer some to be wicked, and consequently miserable, he certainly might protect others both from guilt and punishment. He in this light may be compared to the commander of a numerous army, who, though he is obliged to expose many to danger, and some to destruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways ; but so long as he exercises this power for the good of the whole, these distinctions amongst individuals ought never to be imputed to partiality or injustice.

The

The doctrine* of sacrifice, or vicarious punishment, is the most universal, and yet, exclusive of this plan, the most absurd of all religious tenets that ever entered into the mind of man; so absurd is it, that how it came to be so universal is not easy to be accounted for: Pagans, Jews, and Christians, have all agreed in this one point, though differing in all others; and have all treated it as a self-evident principle, that the sins of one creature might be atoned for by the sufferings of another: but from whence they derived this strange opinion, none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce in its defence the least shadow of a reason; for that there should be any manner of connection between the miseries of one

* If the punishments of the wicked serve not some ends with which we are unacquainted, the sufferings of the innocent can possibly bear no manner of relation to them; and consequently the words Sacrifice, Atonement, Propitiation, and Vicarious Punishments, can no more have any ideas affixed to them than the ringing of a bell or the blowing of a trumpet, but are mere sounds, without any meaning at all.

being

being and the guilt of another ; or that the punishing the innocent, and excusing the guilty, should be a mark of God's detestation of sin ; or, that two acts of the highest injustice should make one of justice, is so fundamentally wrong, so diametrically opposite to common sense, and all our ideas of justice, that it is equally astonishing that so many should believe it themselves or impose it upon others. But on the foregoing theory this also may be a little cleared up, and will by no means appear so very inconsistent with reason : for if a certain quantity of misery in some part of the universal system is necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole ; and if this necessity arises from its answering some purposes incomprehensible to the human understanding ; I will ask any impartial reasoner, why the sufferings of one being may not answer the same ends, or be as effectual towards promoting universal good, as the sufferings of another ? If the miseries of individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards

towards the support of the public, why may not the sufferings of one creature serve the same purposes, or absolve as much of that necessary tax, as the sufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or satisfaction for their sufferings ; that is, for the sufferings due to the public utility from the punishment of their crimes, without which the happiness of the whole could not subsist, unless they should be replaced by the sufferings of others ? As we are entirely ignorant why misery has any existence at all, or what interest it serves in the general system of things, this may possibly be the case, for any thing we know ; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm with reason : reason indeed cannot inform us that it is so, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to reason.

If I mistake not, it might be shewn, that this principle of the necessity of moral evil, and its punishment, is the foundation on which the whole fabric of the christian dispensation is erected ; the principle itself is avowed by the author of that dispensation in

clear and exprefs words : *It must needs be,* says he, *that offences come ; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.* That is, it is necessary towards compleating the designs of providence, that some men should commit crimes ; but as no individual is compelled by necessity to commit them, woe unto all who are thus guilty. He came, by his excellent precepts and example, to diminish the quantity of moral evil in the world, and of misery consequential from its punishment, but found it necessary to replace that misery in some degree by his own voluntary and unmerited sufferings ; and perhaps the unparalleled tortures inflicted on his disciples and followers might be also necessary and subservient to the same purposes.

From what has been here said, I think it is evident that the origin of evil is by no means so difficult to account for as at first sight it appears ; for it has been plainly shewn that most of those we usually complain of are evils of imperfection, which are rather the absence of comparative advantages than
positive

positive evils, and therefore, properly speaking, no evils at all ; and as such, ought to be entirely struck out of the catalogue. It has likewise been made appear, that of natural evils, which are the sufferings of sensitive beings, many are but the consequences naturally resulting from the particular circumstances of particular ranks in the scale of existence, which could not have been omitted without the destruction of the whole ; and that many more are in all probability necessary, by means to us incomprehensible, to the production of universal good. Lastly, it has been suggested, that from this necessity of natural evils, may arise the expediency of moral, without which those necessary sufferings must have been with less justice inflicted on perfect innocence ; and moreover, that it is probable moral evil, as well as natural, may have some ultimate tendency to the good of the whole ; and that the crimes and punishments of some beings may, by some means or other, totally beyond the

reach of our narrow capacities, contribute to the felicity of much greater numbers.

This plan, Sir, I am persuaded is not far distant from the truth ; and on this foundation, if I mistake not, a system of morality and religion, more compleat and solid, more consistent with reason, and with christianity too, might be erected than any which has yet appeared : I heartily wish that some person of more learning, abilities, and leisure than myself, (and much more, I am sure, of all it would require) encouraged by your favour, and assisted by your sagacity, would undertake it, and condescend to fill up these out-lines so inaccurately sketched out by,

S I R, &c.

L E T.

LETTER V.

ON POLITICAL EVILS.

S I R,

ACCORDING to my proposed plan there still remain two sorts of evils to be accounted for, political and religious ; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with so abstruse and unentertaining a correspondence) I shall endeavour to shew you, that it is utterly impossible, even for omnipotence itself, to give a perfect government, or a perfect religion to an imperfect creature ; and therefore, that the numberless imperfections inherent in all human governments and religions are not imputable to God, nor any defect of power, wisdom, or goodness in him ; but only to the inferiority of man's station in the universe, which necessarily exposes him to natural and moral evils, and must, for the same reason, to po-

litical and religious ; which are indeed but the consequences of the other. Superior beings may probably form to themselves, or receive from their Creator, government without tyranny or corruption, and religions without delusions or absurdities ; but man cannot : God indeed may remove him into so exalted a society ; but whilst he continues to be man, he must be subject to innumerable evils ; amongst which those I call political and religious are far from being the least.

But as these two kinds of evils are very different, they will require different considerations ; I shall therefore in the present confine myself to the political only ; by which I mean all those grievous burthens of tyranny and oppression, of violence and corruption, of war and desolation, under which all ages and nations have ever groaned on account of government : little less destructive perhaps to the happiness of mankind, than even anarchy itself ; but which, notwithstanding, are so woven into the very
 5 essence

essence of all human governments from the depravity of man, that without them none can be either established, maintained, or administered, nor consequently can they be prevented without changing that depravity into perfection ; that is, without a compleat alteration in human nature. How this comes to pass may be easily explained by a short examination, first into the nature and origin of government in general, and afterwards into those of particular forms and policies ; than which nothing has been more commonly misunderstood and misrepresented.

As to government in general, it is no wonder that it is so productive of evil, since its very nature consists of power trusted in the hands of such imperfect and vicious creatures as men, and exercised over others as imperfect and vicious as themselves ; in which there must be pride, avarice, and cruelty on one side ; envy, ignorance, and obstinacy on the other ; and injustice and self-interest on both. Its origin also arises from the same impure source of human im-

I 4 perfection ;

perfection ; that is, men being neither wise nor honest enough to pursue their common or mutual interests without compulsion, are obliged to submit to some, in order to secure their lives and properties from the depredations of all : but though this necessity drives them into some kind of government, yet it can never decide who shall govern, because all men being by nature equal, every one has an equal right to this superiority : this, therefore, can be determined only by more imperfections ; that is, by the struggles of ambition, treachery, violence, and corruption ; from success in which universal scramble are derived all the mighty empires of the earth : one man at first, by some of these methods, acquiring the command over a few, then by their aid extending his power over greater numbers, and at last, by the assistance of those numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, subduing all opposition : and thus we see all human government is the offspring of violence and corruption, and must inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain also that
national

national governments can never be supported by any other methods than those by which they were at first raised; for, being all independent of each other, and retaining still their original inclination to devour each other; and having no superior tribunal to refer to for justice, they can have no means to secure their own possessions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by force, which is called the right of war; that is, the right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power; for war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing else but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than parishes, nor men to kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal constitutions of all these governments, we shall find likewise, that they must be administered by the same violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their origin; that is, by hiring one part of the society to force the
other

other into subjection; and that none of them ever subsisted any longer than whilst the stronger part, not always the most numerous, found it for their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience; for it should be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that men will never submit to each other merely for the sake of public utility*, too remote a benefit to make any impression on the dull senses of the multitude; but must be always beat or bribed into obedience. Higher orders of beings may submit to each other on nobler motives, from their

* If any one is so ignorant of human nature, as to fancy that they will, let him make the experiment in a single parish, and there, if without power or compulsion, interest or gratuity, solely by the strength of reason, and motives of public advantage, he can persuade the inhabitants to submit to equal and necessary taxes, to repair roads, build bridges, inclose commons, drain marshes, employ their poor, or perform any works of general utility; if he can accomplish this, let him retain his opinion; but if he finds it utterly impracticable, let him not expect that it can ever be done in a whole nation, in which there are so many more factions, interests, and absurdities to contend with.

sense

sense of virtue or of universal benefit ; but man can be governed by nothing but the fear of punishment or the hopes of reward ; that is, by self-interest, the great principle that operates in the political world in the same manner that attraction does in the natural, preserving order and restraining every thing to its proper course by the continual endeavours of every individual to draw all power and property to himself*.

If we descend to the examination of particular forms of government, we shall see them all exactly correspond with this general plan ; we shall find that none of them owe their origin to patriarchal power, the divine right of princes, or the uninfluenced choice of the people ; things which never existed but in the idle dreams of visionary politicians ; but all to the struggles of ambition

* There is indeed one other method of government frequently made use of by the most illustrious princes and legislators, that is fraud ; but, as this operates only by the appearance of self-interest, it may properly be comprehended under that head.

and

and self interest, subsiding at last into some kind of policy ; either into absolute monarchy, or some species of popular government more or less remote from it, as the different parts of it have had strength or fortune to prevail ; all which must be carried on by the same vicious methods of violence or corruption, and consequently be productive of numberless, if not of equal, evils.

In absolute monarchies, for instance, great violence must be exercised to keep men, by nature equal, in so unnatural a subjection ; this must produce plots, rebellions, civil wars, and massacres ; and these must require more violence to repress them ; but this violence cannot be used without much corruption ; for it is not the person of the sovereign, his crown and scepter, that can preserve his authority, nor can he destroy thousands with his own hand, like a hero in a romance ; a powerful army must be kept in pay to enslave the people, and a numerous

merous clergy to deceive them*; whose ambition, avarice, luxury, and cruelty must be fatiated with the blood and treasures of that very people as a reward for their services: hence infinite evils must arise, the lives, liberties, and properties of all must be dependent on the capricious will of one, or what is worse, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers, and favourites: justice must be perverted by favour, and that favour can seldom be obtained but by adulation, servility, and treachery; this produces all kinds of moral evils, and these beget more political.

In democratical governments, if there is less violence there is more corruption; which in these indeed is the basis of all power, and

* It has been represented as if the author by this designed to insinuate, that the whole business of the clergy was to deceive the people; than which nothing can be more distant from his intentions: all that he means is, that men will not easily submit to tyranny unless their consciences are first enslaved; or that popery is the most effectual support of arbitrary power: a proposition which he supposes no one will presume to contradict.

productive

productive of the most mischievous effects; here all things are at the disposal of an ignorant and giddy multitude, always led to their own destruction by the flimsy eloquence and pretended patriotism of knaves, fools, and enthusiastic madmen; or commonly of some extraordinary genius, formed for popularity by a lucky composition of all these excellent ingredients; all subordination is subverted; and the most insolent and vicious of the people must be careffed, bribed, and intoxicated, and by that means rendered still more insolent and vicious; and all who by these methods acquire their favour, must be no less vicious than themselves. If in despotic governments power cannot be attained but by servility and adulation, in democratical it can never be acquired but by the more pernicious vices of turbulence and faction; for which reason these are ever sure to be governed by the most wicked, ambitious, avaricious, and mischievous of their members.

Mixed governments, though perhaps productive

ductive of fewer evils than either of the former, yet must necessarily partake of those belonging to both, and be supported by more or less of violence, as they more or less approach the despotic ; or of corruption, as they come nearer to the democratical principles : the further they shrink from the iron scourges of the one, the more will they be entangled in the golden fetters of the other ; for corruption must always increase in due proportion to the decrease of arbitrary power ; since where there is less power to command obedience, there must be more bribery to purchase it, or there can be no government at all. These have, besides, many evils peculiar to themselves, the very excellence of these sort of constitutions being productive of inconveniences : for this excellence consisting principally in this, that their different parts are able to counteract each others mischievous intentions, the reins of government are kept tight only by each pulling a different way, and they subsist by a perpetual contention, like a body kept
 alive

alive by the opposite effects of contrary poisons : a very precarious and uneasy kind of existence ! This exposes them in some measure to all the evils incident to both absolute and popular governments, though in a less degree ; to the oppression of the one, and the licentiousness of the other, to factions at home, weakness abroad, and infinite expence in all parts of their administration : yet are these mixed constitutions the very best that human wisdom could ever discover for the regulation of human societies.

All these evils arise from the nature of things and the nature of man, and not from the weakness or wickedness of particular men, or their accidental ascendancy in particular governments : the degrees of them may indeed be owing to these, but their existence is immutable. So long as the imperfection of human nature continues, so long will princes, for the most part, convert that power with which they are trusted for the sake of public utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice, luxury, or ambition ;

so long will the people prefer present self-interest to remote benefits arising from national prosperity; and so long will corrupt ministers employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many forever are lopt off,

Non deficit aureus alter.

It is the misapprehension of this, that is the fundamental error of all ignorant, but well-meaning speculative politicians*, of all others the most untractable in government,
and

* It is a strange, but a certain truth, that in politics most principles speculatively right are practically wrong: to give a few instances of this kind out of many commonly adopted; viz. that those who are possessors of most property will fight best in its defence; that national business is most successfully carried on by assemblies of men uninfluenced and unconnected; that unbounded liberty, civil and ecclesiastical, is most conducive to public happiness and virtue: all these propositions have reason on their side, but experience against them; they all captivate vulgar minds, because they look like truth; and they look like truth, because they would be true if mankind in general

and mischievous in business, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment ; who endeavour to destroy all governments, because they are not perfect ; and oppose all administrations, because they cannot govern men by such means as they are not designed or formed to be governed by ; who, by a Syphæan kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a stone that must recoil upon them ; and to render that faultless, which infinite power and wisdom cannot exempt from inconveniences, abuses, and imperfections.

Should one enumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from government without the total alteration of human nature, they would be endless ; to instance but a few : all political bodies, like the natural, must have the seeds of their own dissolution sown in their very essence, and like them be

acted upon honest or even upon rational principles ; but as in fact they do neither, they are utterly false, and all political structures built on such unstable foundations will inevitably fall to the ground.

destroyed

destroyed by every excess ; by excess of poverty or riches, of slavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adversity or prosperity ; a strong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear excess even of the greatest good ; and yet they cannot be formed of more durable materials, so long as they are constituted of human creatures. All power trusted in the hands of so imperfect a creature as man must be pernicious and oppressive ; and yet somewhere such power must be trusted. All human laws must be liable to misconstruction and uncertainty ; yet without laws property cannot be secured. All popular elections must be attended with corruption, licentiousness, and the perversion of justice ; yet without them the liberty of no country can be preserved. All national provisions for the poor must not only be encouragements to idleness, but productive of contests, and oftentimes of cruelty ; yet without such many honest but unfortunate people must inevitably perish. All religious tests and subscriptions are in

their own natures subversive of truth and morals ; yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will scarcely permit any government to subsist without them. Trade and wealth are the strength and the pursuit of every wise nation ; yet these must certainly produce luxury, which no less certainly must produce their destruction. All war is a complication of all manner of evils natural and moral, that is, of misery and wickedness ; yet without it national contentions can never be determined. No government can be carried on, nor subordination preserved, without forms and ceremonials, pomp and parade ; yet all such, from the inferiority of human nature giving itself airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the despicable expedients it is obliged to have recourse to to support it, must always have something mean and ridiculous in them to exalted understandings. All governments are in a great measure upheld by absurd notions infused into the minds of the people, of the divine right of some particular

person or family to reign over them; a foolish partiality for some particular spot of ground; an outrageous zeal for some religion which they cannot understand, or a senseless pursuit of glory which they can never attain: these are all false principles; yet without them, or some like them, no nation can long subsist: they can never be defended by reason, yet reason can produce no others that can supply their places. Every flourishing nation endeavours to improve arts, and cultivate reason and good sense; yet, if these are extended too far, or too universally diffused, no national government or national religion can long stand their ground; for it is with old establishments as with old houses, their deformities are commonly their supports, and these can never be removed without endangering the whole fabric. In short, no government can be administered without in some degree deceiving the people, oppressing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, opposing

factions to each other, and temporising with parties.

It is this necessity for evil in all government, which gives that weight and popularity, which usually attends all those who oppose and calumniate any government whatever; appearing always to have reason on their side, because the evils of all power are conspicuous to the meanest capacity; whereas the necessity for those evils are perceivable only to superior understandings. Every one can feel the burthen of taxes and see the inconveniences of armies, places, and pensions, that must encrease them; but very few are able to comprehend, that no government can be supported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater must be their number and necessity. The most ignorant can perceive the mischiefs that must arise from corrupt ministers and venal parliaments; but it requires some sagacity to discern that assemblies of men unconnected by self-interest,

rest, will no more draw together in the business of the public, than horses without harness or bridles ; but like them, instead of being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot, stop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to pass that all ignorant wrongheaded people naturally run into opposition and faction, whilst the wise man knows that these evils cannot be eradicated, and that their excess only can be prevented ; that thus far every honest man will endeavour to his utmost, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men must always act in the same manner, if in the same circumstances ; that politics are a science as reducible to certainty as mathematicks, and in them effects as invariably follow their causes ; that the operations of will are as uniform as those of matter and motion ; and that though the actions of individuals are contingencies, those of numbers are constant

and invariable ; that, though a single man may possibly prefer public utility to private advantage, it is utterly impossible, that the majority of numerous bodies should be actuated by the same generous and patriotic principles * ; these can spring only from virtue and wisdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehensive understandings ; which, being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be

* This may be demonstrated by a familiar instance : It is by no means uncommon for a single die to come up a six, although the odds against it are five to one ; but that a majority of five hundred dice should at the same time come up six's is scarcely within the power of fortune ; because the odds against each individual become almost infinite when operating upon the whole five hundred together. For the same reason, supposing every sixth man to be wise, honest, and public-spirited, which surely in any country is a very liberal allowance, there would not be the smallest probability that the majority of any five hundred to be chosen out of the whole, would be of that sort, though elected with the utmost impartiality ; but, if ambition, self-interest, and corruption interfere in the choice, as they most infallibly will, these will render it totally impossible.

governed

governed: nor can they be bestowed in any extraordinary degree on those who govern, who would thereby be rendered unfit for their occupations: statesmen and ministers, who must be hackneyed in the ways of men, cannot be made of such pure and refined materials; peculiar must be the composition of that little creature called a *Great Man*. He must be formed of all kinds of contradictions: he must be indefatigable in business, to fit him for the labours of his station, and at the same time fond of pleasures, to enable him to attach many to his interests, by a participation of their vices: he must be master of much artifice and knavery, his situation requiring him to employ, and be employed by, so many knaves; yet he must have some honesty, or those very knaves will be unwilling to trust him: he must be possessed of great magnanimity perpetually to confront surrounding enemies and impending dangers; yet of great meanness, to flatter those enemies, and suffer tamely continual injuries and abuses: he must be wise
enough.

enough to conduct the great affairs of mankind with sagacity and success, and to acquire riches and honours for his reward; and at the same time foolish enough to think it worth a wise man's while to meddle with such affairs at all, and to accept of such imaginary rewards for real sufferings. Since then in all human governments such must the governors, and such the governed eternally be, it is certain they must be ever big with numberless imperfections, and productive of abundant evils: and it is no less plain, that if infinite goodness could not exclude natural and moral evils, infinite power can never prevent political. *

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature and human government, will not appear to you too much of the caricature kind: your experience in both must inform you that it is like, though your good nature may incline you to be sorry that it is so. I trust likewise to your good sense to distinguish, that what has here been said of their imperfections and abuses, is by no means

means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to shew their necessity : to this every wise man ought quietly to submit, endeavouring at the same time to redress them to the utmost of his power ; which can be effected by one method only ; that is, by a reformation of manners : for as all political evils derive their original from moral, these can never be removed, until those are first amended. He, therefore, who strictly adheres to virtue and sobriety in his conduct, and enforces them by his example, does more real service to a state than he who displaces a bad minister, or dethrones a tyrant ; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the cause of the disease. No immoral man then can possibly be a true patriot ; and all those who profess outrageous zeal for the liberty and prosperity of their country, and at the same time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but despicable quacks, by fraud or ignorance increasing the disorders they pretend to remedy :

as

as such, I know, they have always appeared
to your superior judgment, and such they
are ever esteemed by,

S I R, &c.

LET-

LETTER VI.

ON RELIGIOUS EVILS.

S I R,

I Now come to my last head of evils, which I call religious; by which I mean all that madness and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen under the name of religion; together with all those persecutions, massacres, and martyrdoms, which some have been induced to inflict, and others to suffer, from an enthusiastic zeal for those errors and absurdities: evils of the most enormous size, and which of all others are the most difficult to be accounted for, as their existence seems most inconsistent with infinite goodness, and most easily preventable by infinite power. For, though human nature could not be exempted from natural and moral evil (as has been shewn) even by omnipotence, yet, one would think a far less degree

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degree of power might have been sufficient to have defended it from religious ; by imparting to mankind a true, rational, and explicit system of theology and ethicks ; by which means all the absurdities of false religions, and all the calamities flowing from those absurdities, would have been effectually prevented. Wonderful, therefore, must it appear, since the happiness of men, through every part of their existence, so much depends on their religion, that is, on their entertaining right notions of God and his attributes, of their duty to him, and their behaviour to each other ; most wonderful, I say, and astonishing it must appear, that a wise and benevolent Creator should so far have deserted his creatures on this important occasion, as to have suffered them, through all generations, to have wandered amidst such perilous precipices in the dark ; or if at any time he has vouchsafed them any supernatural light, that it should have been so faint and glimmering that it has rather served to terrify them with the gloomy prospect

spect of their danger, than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as history will carry us, we shall find all ages and nations practising, under the name of religion, such inhuman, obscene, stupid, and execrable idolatries, that it would disgrace human nature but to enumerate them ; we shall see the wisest men of the wisest countries consulting oracles of wood and stone, and confiding in the foolish superstition of the flight of birds, the entrails of beasts, and the pecking of chickens ; we shall see them butchering their innocent herds and flocks as an atonement for their vices, and sacrificing their enemies, their slaves, their children, and sometimes themselves, to appease the wrath of their imaginary deities, of whose worship no cruelty was too horrid to be made a part ; and by whose infamous examples no wickedness was too execrable to be patronised. At length christianity appeared ; a sketch of morality the most rational, and of religion the most sublime the world had ever seen ; which, if ever God condescended

condescended to reveal his will to man, undoubtedly makes the fairest pretensions to be that revelation ; and indeed, if we seriously consider its internal excellence, the reasonableness of its morality, the sublimity of its theology, that it alone has fixed the right criterion of virtue, alone discovered the magnanimity of forgiveness ; that its notions of the deity, his attributes and dispensations, are so unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages, and yet so well confirmed by the learned discoveries of all succeeding times ; so far exalted above all human reason, and yet so consonant with it, and what is most conclusive, so infinitely above the capacities of those who published them to the world ; if we add to this its obscure rise and amazing progress, I think, we can scarcely doubt but that there must be something supernatural in it : and yet, with all these marks of divinity stamped upon it, far from answering that idea of perfection which we might expect from the divine interposition, it was
but

but a sketch, whose out-lines indeed appear the work of a consummate master, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defects in its institution, and was attended with many and great evils in its consequences ; in its institution it wanted universality, authenticity*, perspicuity†, and policy‡, and in its consequences

* By want of authenticity, is here meant only the want of that demonstrable and infallible authority, of which all historical facts are in their own nature incapable ; and which, had the friends of the christian revelation never pretended to bestow upon it, the truth of that event had been no more disputed, than the truth of any other well-attested history whatsoever.

† The want of perspicuity in this revelation, needs surely no other testimony than the millions of writers, who, for seventeen centuries, have laboured to demonstrate, harmonise, systemise, illustrate, and explain every one of its doctrines ; and the no less numberless and various opinions that remain to this day concerning them all : much indeed of this obscurity has proceeded from men's endeavours to make it what they fancied it should have been, but for which it was never intended ; that is, a regular, clear, and explicit body of moral and political institutes.

‡ By policy is here meant all institutions and regulations

quences it was soon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the most mischievous effects. Its great author designed it not to be exempted from any of these imperfections. He revealed it only to a small and obscure corner of the world in parables and

lations of human government, both civil and ecclesiastical; concerning which the author of the christian religion has carefully avoided giving any directions. All these he has left to be ordered by every state in such a manner as shall appear to them most convenient, and has commanded his disciples to be subject, as men, to their ordinances, *not only for wrath, but for conscience sake*; but foreseeing the infinite mischiefs that must arise from trusting human creatures with a divine power, he has forbid them, as christians, either to exercise, or submit to, any authority over each other, under any pretence of its being derived from himself: *We know, he says, that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you, &c.* Matt. xx. 25. And perhaps there is no stronger proof of the divine wisdom of this great instructor of mankind, than the extraordinary caution with which he has passed over a subject, on which no rules could be prescribed not inconsistent either with practice or with virtue: and yet a subject which all other legislators have considered as their most important object.

mysteries;

mysteries ; he guarded not its original purity, which seems to have died with himself, by committing it to any written records, but left it in the hands of illiterate men, who, though they were honest enough to die for it, were never wise enough perfectly to understand it. All policy he disclaims in express words, saying, *My kingdom is not of this world* ; that is, I meddle not with the political affairs of mankind ; I teach men to despise the world, but not to govern it. Nor did he expect any better consequences from its progress than those which actually followed : he was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, though his primitive institution breathed nothing but peace and forbearance, good-will and benevolence ; yet that in mixing with the policies and interests of mankind, it would be productive of tyranny and oppression, of martyrdoms and massacres, of national wars and family dissensions. *Think not*, says he, *I come to send peace on earth, I come not to send peace but a sword : for I am come to set a*

man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inscrutable source can all these imperfections, and all these consequent evils derive their existence? On what incomprehensible plan must the wise disposer of all things proceed, to suffer men thus to bewilder themselves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence to plunge into the gulphs of wickedness and misery, when the least direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them through the flowery paths of truth to virtue and felicity? Strange! that he has not given them reason sufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condescended to assist that reason with his infinite wisdom, even the religion that results from that supernatural assistance, should be still deficient in almost every one of the principal requisites necessary towards accomplishing the great and beneficent ends it was designed for! that
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it should want universality to render it impartial, authenticity to make it demonstrable, perspicuity to make it intelligible, and policy to make it useful to mankind; that it should immediately have been corrupted, and from that corruption been productive of all the misery and wickedness it seemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we shall find, that these evils, like all those of which we have before treated, owe their existence to no defect of goodness or power in God, but to the imperfection of man, and their own necessity; that is, to the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature: from whence this impracticability arises, I will endeavour to explain.

There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind; that is, either by the deductions which he has impowered him to make by the force of that natural reason which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary interposition of divine revelation: now from the first of these little need

be said to shew that nothing perfect can be expected: our reason is unstable in its foundations, and uncertain in its conclusions; our lives are extremely short, and our progress in science no less tedious, and retarded by numberless obstacles; much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language to express them; few men have capacities to reason, and fewer leisure; some having sense but no learning, want materials to work with; others having learning and no sense, become more absurd by having amassed much matter to mistake about; so that to raise any tolerable system of religion or morals, from human reason, requires the labours of many generations: from all which have already past how little truth can we collect? and yet, perhaps, much of that little is owing to revelation, which we are apt to think unnecessary from the very assistance we have received from it; like the country-man who despised the sun because it shined in the day-time. We see but a very small part of the great whole, and
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see that small part so superficially, that we comprehend not the essence of any thing; neither of body * or spirit, of space † or time

* Metaphysicians divide all beings into spirit and matter: to spirit they attribute motion, activity, sensibility, thought, will, and reason, free from all solidity and extension; to matter they ascribe solidity and extension only, void of all self-motion, sense, and perception; but these descriptions are quite arbitrary, founded only upon their own imaginations, and by no means consistent with experience; for spirit seems to have many properties not so distinct from matter by its intimate union with it in the composition of all animals; and matter has certainly many qualities contradictory to this distinction, such as cohesion, attraction, elasticity, electricity, fermentation, heat, and vegetation, none of which can be accounted for from the mere passive principles of solidity and extension.

† Many philosophers have considered time and space as real essences; whereas they have certainly no more than an imaginary existence, derived solely from the imperfection of human conceptions, and human language. They are in themselves really nothing, and the attributes we bestow upon them are applicable with equal propriety to nothing; that is, nothing

time, of infinity* or eternity; we know scarce any thing of any thing, and least of all of the nature of God or ourselves; and therefore it is by no means surprising that all religions derived from such a source should

has neither beginning nor end, nor can be comprehended within any bounds. The intervening period between historical facts we distinguish by the names of days and years; the distances between places we call yards and miles; and from this manner of expressing ourselves they gain the appearance of being something; whereas, abstracted from those facts and places, they are really nothing: so that if all things were annihilated, space would immediately vanish, and, literally speaking, *Time would be no more.*

* All the ideas we have of infinity and eternity are acquired by adding, in our imagination, miles to miles, and years to years, by which means we come never the nearer to them; for no addition of parts can ever make any thing infinite or eternal; no two objects can be placed at an infinite distance, because they would then be the two ends of infinity: an infinite number is a contradiction in terms, and therefore every thing that is infinite or eternal must exist in some manner which bears no manner of relation to space or time, and which must therefore be to us totally incomprehensible.

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be full of errors and absurdities. If it be asserted, that God might have given to man a more comprehensive reason, and a greater insight into nature and futurity; I answer, he certainly might, and he might also have given him the strength of the horse, and the swiftness of the stag, as well as the understanding of an angel; but then he had not continued to be man; or if he had, he would have suffered many superior evils from these unhappy acquisitions.

If we consider the other method, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind, we shall find it no less incapable of producing a perfect one; because though God is sufficiently able to give a perfect religion, man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to creatures, of which he himself has made them incapable by their nature and formation; he cannot instruct a mole in astronomy, or an oyster in music, because he has not given them members, nor faculties necessary for the acquisition of those sciences; neither is
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this any diminution of his omnipotence, because acting in such a manner would be willing contrarieties at the same time : it would be opposing his own designs, making creatures what they are not, and granting them powers which he thought proper to deny them ; a revelation therefore from God can never be such as we might expect from infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, but must condescend to the ignorance and infirmities of man. Was the wisest legislator in the world to compose laws for a nursery, they must be childish laws ; so was God to reveal a religion to mankind, though the revealer was divine, the religion must be human, or it could be of no use to those for whose sake it was revealed ; and therefore, like them, it must be liable to numberless imperfections, amongst which all those deficiencies before-mentioned are absolutely unavoidable, and impossible to be prevented by any power whatever ; these are the want of universality, authenticity, perspicuity, and policy ; its certain corruption, with all that inundation

tion of wickedness and misery which must flow from that corruption. Great and numerous evils ! from which it is not difficult to shew, that no revelation communicated to man can be exempted by an omnipotent revealer.

First then it must want universality ; that is, however conducive it may be to the virtue and happiness of mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all men in all ages and all nations of the world ; because, from the nature of things, it must have a beginning and a progression ; it must at first be revealed at some time and in some place ; and whenever and wherever that is, there must have been times and places in which it was not revealed ; and therefore it is impossible it can be universal : and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the revealer, but from the modes of existence of all human affairs.

It must likewise want authenticity, that is, though its divine authority may be more or less credible according to the circumstances
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of the evidence, yet it can never be capable of a direct or demonstrative proof; because God must communicate this revelation to mankind either by a general or a particular inspiration; that is, either by inspiring all men, or by inspiring a few to teach it to others: the first of these methods, or an universal inspiration, is impossible in nature, and absurd even in imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature: the other must ever be liable to infinite uncertainty; because, though a man may possibly know when he himself is inspired, (though that, I think, may be very well questioned) yet, that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of divine commission to others, who are uninspired, seems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be ascertained, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to distinguish it: the excellence of the revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or less probable,

bable, but can never amount to a certain proof, because we know so little of the ends and consequences of things, and so much less of the nature of miracles : we understand indeed nothing about them, but that we ourselves are unable to perform them ; but what beings of superior orders may be able to do we cannot tell ; nor yet what power, inclination, or permission such beings may have to deceive us. If it is impossible, therefore, we can be certain of the divine authority of a revelation, even by a personal communication with its first author, much less can we be assured of it through the fallacious mediums of tradition or history ; for whoever observes the propensity men have to impose upon themselves and others, how difficult it is to come at a true representation of the commonest fact, even at the distance of a few miles, or a few years, will be easily convinced, that all human tradition can be nothing more than a complication of designed fraud and inevitable error ; a glass which misrepresents all objects by magnifying or

diminishing

diminishing them, just as it is placed by the hand of knavery for the inspection of folly and credulity. History, indeed, carries with it a greater authority, but must ever be liable to infinite imperfections : we can never be certain that the writers of it, being men, were not imposed upon themselves, or did not intend to impose on others ; and therefore its original evidence cannot be conclusive, and must grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity ; it must necessarily be subject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and customs, ignorant transcribers, false translations, interpolations, and forgeries ; and as the histories of religions are more connected with men's interests than those of other occurrences, so they must be ever more subject to these frauds and impositions ; for the same reason that a bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a news-paper. It is therefore impossible that history can afford us any certain proof of a supernatural and miraculous dispensation, because a fact, unlikely to be

true,

true, can never be demonstrated by a relation not impossible to be false. If it be said, that God may inspire the writers of such important records with infallibility; I answer, the proof that he has so inspired them will be attended with no less difficulty, than the proof of that divine authority which is to be established by it; and it must ever be absurd to prove the truth of a revelation by the infallibility of its records, and the infallibility of its records from the truth of the revelation. It is plain, therefore, that, though infinite goodness may reveal a religion to so imperfect a creature as man, yet infinite power cannot, by reason of that imperfection, give to that revelation such a degree of authenticity, that is, such a demonstrable proof of its divine authority, as some men unreasonably expect, and others as ridiculously bestow upon it*.

It

* Nothing here offered is meant by any means to invalidate the authority of revelation: that of the christian is possessed of as much certainty as the nature
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It must want perspicuity ; that is, it must be much more obscure, both in its speculative and practical doctrines, than might be expected from the interposition of infinite wisdom, truth, and benevolence. In its speculative doctrines, obscurity must be unavoidable, because they must treat of subjects above the reach of our comprehensions ; which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man to conceive ; and therefore no power can impart to us clear and explicit ideas of such things, without first bestowing on us new faculties and new senses ; that is, without the total alteration of our natures. But what is most of all extraordinary is, that it must be likewise to a certain degree obscure in its practical and moral precepts ; and this from a reason not the less valid for having never be-

of the fact, and the nature of its evidence will admit of. Those who endeavour to bestow more upon it, do in reality but make it less ; and, like unskilful architects, weaken a building already sufficiently strong, by overloading it with unnecessary supporters.

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fore been insisted on ; which is, from the necessity of moral evil ; that is, since God, as has been shewn, was obliged by necessity to admit moral evil into the creation, he must probably be obliged, by the same necessity, to suffer it in some degree to continue ; and therefore cannot enforce the universal practice of virtue by laws so explicit, by threats and promises so glaring, and by commands so incontestably of divine authority, as can admit of no doubt ; for these would be so absolutely irresistible as at once to eradicate all human vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impossibility of its exclusion without the introduction of greater evils, or the loss of superior good. If omnipotence could not prevent the existence of moral evil by the original formation of man, totally to extirpate it by revelation, would be to counteract his own wise, though incomprehensible designs ; and therefore a divine revelation can never be a regular body of practical institutes, clear and perspicuous, free from

all doubts and altercations, enforced by perpetual miracles, by visible and immediate rewards and punishments; but a still voice whispering gentle warnings, divine admonitions, and supernatural truths; a light shining in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native obscurity of the human mind, and discovering by faint glimmerings the designs of providence, and a distant prospect of a future life.

It must also want policy; that is, it can never prescribe political rules by which mankind can be conducted in the government of nations, or their pretended rights of war and peace, because all these affairs being incapable (as has been shewn) of being carried on by any other means than those of violence, fraud, and corruption; a divine revelation cannot possibly give any directions about them; because all such must be necessarily inconsistent either with virtue or with practicability; totally to forbid these methods of governing mankind, who can be governed by no other, would be destructive

tive of all government ; to allow them, of all morality : and therefore it is necessary that men should be left to act in these matters at their peril, as particular circumstances may require, with only a general system of religion and morality for their guide. If a divine revelation can give no laws for the management of civil government, much less can it institute any new policies peculiar to itself, under the names of spiritual or ecclesiastical ; all which, however divine in their original, must necessarily be administered, if administered by man, by the same unjustifiable methods as others ; with this additional inconvenience, that they could never be justly resisted. God cannot, therefore, I apprehend, delegate spiritual power to man, without patronising all that violence, corruption, and iniquity, which must result from it, and without which no power in the hands of men can be exercised over men. For the imperfection of man is incompatible with the purity of a divine government. The government of all creatures must cor-

respond with their natures ; and it seems to me as impossible that societies of men should submit under a divine government, as that wolves and tygers should live together under the regulations of human policy ; but most of all impossible it must be that a divine and human government should subsist together in the same society, for they must immediately clash ; and whenever that happens, the least spark of divine authority, if really divine, must infallibly consume all human power, and destroy all civil government whatever.

Lastly, it must very soon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the most mischievous effects : for, as the purest stream poured into an impure vessel, must partake of its impurity, so must the most perfect religion, that can be revealed by God to so imperfect a creature as man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great evils both natural and moral ; that is, much of that misery and wickedness which it was intended to prevent : this no
wisdom

wisdom can obviate, no power put a stop to, so long as that imperfection remains ; but it must constantly come to pass from a train of unavoidable consequences, which must invariably follow their causes, so long as human nature continues what it is.

For instance, when a divine revelation is first communicated to mankind, it must be received (if received at all) because its precepts are approved, and its authority believed ; and all those nations who thus approve the one, and believe the other, must esteem it both their interest and their duty to encourage and support it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profess it, by forming from it their national religion, and public worship, and by maintaining an order of men to preach that religion, and minister that worship to the people ; all which amounts to a national establishment. Now the moment any religion becomes national, or established, its purity must certainly be lost, because it is then impossible to

keep it unconnected with men's interests; and if connected, it must inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annexed to any religious profession, they will be sure to call in all those who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the sake of interest, fools will follow them for the sake of fashion; and when once it is in such hands, omnipotence itself can never preserve its purity. That very order of men, who are maintained to support its interests, will sacrifice them to their own; and being in the sole possession of all its promises and all its terrors, and having the tenderness of childhood, the weakness of age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I say, these men, vested with all these powers, yet being but men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they must derive from them to the selfish ends of their own avarice and ambition, and consequently to the total destruction of its original purity; from it they will lay claim to powers which it never designed them,

them, and to possessions to which they have no right; to make good these false pretensions, false histories will be forged, and fabulous traditions invented; groundless terrors will be flung out to operate on superstition and timidity; creeds and articles will be contrived to confound all reason, and tests imposed to sift out all who have honesty or courage enough to resist these unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turned into farce and pageantry, to captivate men's eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert piety into superstition, zeal into rancour, and this religion, notwithstanding all its divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained so considerable a part of the world to their interests, they will erect an independent dominion among themselves dangerous to the liberties of mankind, and representing all those who oppose their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be me-

ritorious in his fight to persecute them in this world, and damn them in another. Hence must arise hierarchies, inquisitions, and popery ; for popery is but the consummation of that tyranny which every religious system in the hands of men is in perpetual pursuit of, and whose principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with its success.

This tyranny cannot subsist without fierce and formidable opposition, from whence innumerable sects, schisms, and dissensions will lift up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power which they are fighting to destroy, though unable either to acquire or retain it ; and introductive only of their constant concomitants, ignorance, self-conceit, ill-breeding, obstinacy, anarchy, and confusion. From these contests all kinds of evils must derive their existence, blood-shed and desolation, persecutions, massacres and martyrdoms.

All these evils you see are but the necessary consequences of the national establishment

ment of any religion which God can communicate to man, in whose hands its divinity can never long preserve its purity, or keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly, and wickedness. Nay, so far is the divinity of a revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increase and hasten it; for the greater share of divinity it partakes, the greater must be its excellence; the greater its excellence, the more universal must be its approbation; the more it is approved, the more it must be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the sooner it will be established; and the sooner it is established, the sooner it must be corrupted and made subservient to the worst purposes of the worst men; yet it is plain this establishment is no more than the consequence of its excellence, and men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preserved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine revelation communicated

municated to man, is, by the nature of man, clearly unavoidable.

From what has been here said it appears plainly, that all the numerous evils which adhere to, and all the mischievous effects which follow all human religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their existence to any want of power, wisdom, or goodness in God, but, like all others, to the imperfection of man; that is, to his folly and wickedness, which must inevitably corrupt them. It is also, I think, no less evident that all arguments levelled against the divine original of christianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious consequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight) may be proved to be vain and inconclusive; and this not by concealing or denying those imperfections and pernicious consequences, as many have absurdly attempted, but by fairly shewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of those creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, so long as those

those continue, these cannot be prevented by any wisdom, goodness, or power whatever*.

Thus, Sir, if I mistake not, I have sufficiently, though concisely, answered that most abstruse and important question, *Whence came evil?* and proved, that all the evils we feel, and all which we see around us, derogate not in the least from the wisdom, power, or goodness of our Creator; but proceed entirely from that subordination which is so necessary to the happiness, and even to the existence of the great and incomprehensible whole. I have shewn that all subordination must imply imperfection in some beings or other; and that all imperfection must con-

* If we look into the deistical writings of all times, we shall find, that they have always attacked the christian religion most successfully from this ground; they have shewed the many imperfections that adhere to it, and then concluded, that nothing imperfect could derive its original from God: their adversaries have injudiciously denied those imperfections, which for the most part are true, and agreed to their conclusion, which is indisputably false; for every thing we possess is derived from God, and yet we possess nothing endued with absolute perfection.

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sist in the absence of comparative good, or
 the admission of positive evil. I have shewn
 that most of the evils we usually complain of
 are of the first kind ; the want only of those
 perfections we see others enjoy, or imagine
 infinite power might have bestowed upon
 ourselves ; which are therefore in fact no
 evils at all : that those of the latter sort, or
 positive evils, are such as from the nature of
 things must intrude themselves into all crea-
 tion, and therefore that omnipotence can do
 no more than make choice of that system
 which admits the fewest ; being obliged by
 the imperfection of all created beings, the
 untractableness of matter, and some incom-
 prehensible connection between good and
 evil, happiness and misery, to admit both, or
 to give existence to neither. I have likewise
 shewn that moral evil may have its neces-
 sity and utility as well as natural ; at least,
 that if natural evils are necessary, moral
 ones are expedient, to prevent that necessary
 misery from falling to the share of perfect
 innocence, and to convert unavoidable suf-
 ferings

ferings into just punishments ; that though
 the essence of all moral evil consists in the
 production of natural, yet it may have some
 collateral tendency to good ; and that the
 wicked, whilst they are justly punished for
 the miseries which they occasion, may prob-
 ably, by that very guilt and punishment,
 some way remotely contribute to universal
 happiness. I have shewn that if natural and
 moral evils could not be prevented, the ex-
 istence of political and religious evils must
 of course be unavoidable, they being but
 the certain consequences of the other : that
 all human government must be in the highest
 degree imperfect, and big with all manner
 of evils, being the dominion of ignorant and
 wicked creatures over each other ; that, as
 such creatures can be governed only by fear
 of punishment or hopes of reward, all go-
 vernment amongst them must be founded
 on violence or corruption, and ever sup-
 ported and administered by the same vicious
 and unjustifiable methods : that no power
 whatever can give a perfect religion to so
 imperfect

imperfect a creature as man, either by nature or revelation ; not by nature, because, whilst that is human nature, he can never discover by reason the truths on which a perfect system of theology or ethics can be erected ; not by revelation, because he wants faculties to comprehend such supernatural discoveries, although they should be imparted to him ; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect religion, it is not possible he could long retain it ; because, if it could be kept entirely separate from his worldly interests, it would soon be neglected and perish in oblivion ; and, if it was not, such a connection would quickly corrupt its purity, and destroy its essence, so that national establishments would be necessary for its support, and yet infallibly productive of its destruction. That all these evils proceed not from wrong dispositions or accidental causes, but singly and solely from the imperfection of man ; and yet that in the gradation from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, there must be one rank occupied by such a crea-

ture as man with all his imperfections about him; that these imperfections must be annexed to his situation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happiness, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion: that, in like manner, all other created beings must have evils and imperfections peculiar to their stations, and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithstanding all which, there is as much good and as little evil in the universal system, as the nature of creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a work equal to what we might expect from the operations of infinite benevolence joined with infinite power.

D I S-

DISQUISITIONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

VOL. III.

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DISQUISITION I.

ON THE CHAIN OF UNIVERSAL BEING.

THE farther we inquire into the works of our great Creator, the more evident marks we shall discover of his infinite wisdom and power, and perhaps in none more remarkable, than in that wonderful chain of beings, with which this terrestrial globe is furnished ; rising above each other, from the senseless clod, to the brightest genius of human kind, in which, though the chain itself is sufficiently visible, the links, which compose it, are so minute, and so finely wrought, that they are quite imperceptible to our eyes. The various qualities, with which these various beings are endued, we perceive without difficulty, but the boundaries of those qualities, which form this chain of subordination, are so mixed, that where one ends, and the next begins, we are unable

to discover. The manner by which this is performed, is a subject well worthy of our consideration, though I do not remember to have seen it much considered ; but on an accurate examination appears to be this.

In order to diffuse all possible happiness, God has been pleased to fill this earth with innumerable orders of beings, superior to each other in proportion to the qualities and faculties which he has thought proper to bestow upon them ; to mere matter he has given extension, solidity, and gravity ; to plants, vegetation ; to animals, life and instinct ; and to man, reason ; each of which superior qualities augments the excellence and dignity of the possessor, and places him higher in the scale of universal existence. In all these, it is remarkable, that he has not formed this necessary and beautiful subordination, by placing beings of quite different natures above each other, but by granting some additional quality to each superior order, in conjunction with all those possessed by their inferiors ; so that,
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though they rise above each other in excellence, by means of these additional qualities, one mode of existence is common to them all, without which they never could have coalesced in one uniform and regular system.

Thus, for instance, in plants we find all the qualities of mere matter, the only order below them, solidity, extension, and gravity; with the addition of vegetation; in animals, all the properties of matter, together with the vegetation of plants, to which is added, life and instinct; and in man we find all the properties of matter, the vegetation of plants, the life and instinct of animals, to all which is superadded reason.

That man is endued with these properties of all inferior orders, will plainly appear by a slight examination of his composition; his body is material, and has all the properties of mere matter, solidity, extension, and gravity; it is also vested with the quality of plants, that is, a power of vegetation, which it incessantly exercises without any knowledge

or consent of his ; it is sown, grows up, expands, comes to maturity, withers, and dies, like all other vegetables : he possesses likewise the qualities of lower animals, and shares their fate ; like them, he is called into life without his knowledge or consent ; like them, he is compelled by irresistible instincts, to answer the purposes for which he was designed ; like them, he performs his destined course, partakes of its blessings, and endures its sufferings for a short time, then dies, and is seen no more : in him instinct is not less powerful than in them, though less visible, by being confounded with reason, which it sometimes concurs with, and sometimes counteracts ; by this, with the concurrence of reason, he is taught the belief of a God, of a future state, and the difference between moral good and evil ; to pursue happiness, to avoid danger, and to take care of himself and his offspring ; by this too he is frequently impelled, in contradiction to reason, to relinquish ease and safety, to traverse inhospitable deserts and tempestuous seas, to inflict and suffer all the miseries of war, and,

and, like the herring and the mackarel, to hasten to his own destruction, for the public benefit, which he neither understands or cares for. Thus is this wonderful chain extended from the lowest to the highest order of terrestrial beings, by links so nicely fitted, that the beginning and end of each is invisible to the most inquisitive eye, and yet they altogether compose one vast and beautiful system of subordination.

The manner by which the consummate wisdom of the divine artificer has formed this gradation, so extensive in the whole, and so imperceptible in the parts, is this:—He constantly unites the highest degree of the qualities of each inferior order to the lowest degree of the same qualities, belonging to the order next above it; by which means, like the colours of a skilful painter, they are so blended together, and shaded off into each other, that no line of distinction is any where to be seen. Thus, for instance, solidity, extension, and gravity, the qualities

of mere matter, being united with the lowest degree of vegetation, compose a stone ; from whence this vegetative power ascending through an infinite variety of herbs, flowers, plants, and trees to its greatest perfection in the sensitive plant, joins there the lowest degree of animal life in the shell-fish, which adheres to the rock ; and it is difficult to distinguish which possesses the greatest share, as the one shews it only by shrinking from the finger, and the other by opening to receive the water which surrounds it. In the same manner this animal life rises from this low beginning in the shell-fish, through innumerable species of insects, fishes, birds, and beasts to the confines of reason, where, in the dog, the monkey, and chimpanzè, it unites so closely with the lowest degree of that quality in man, that they cannot easily be distinguished from each other. From this lowest degree in the brutal Hottentot, reason, with the assistance of learning and science, advances, through the various stages of
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of human understanding, which rise above each other, till in a Bacon or a Newton it attains the summit.

Here we must stop, being unable to pursue the progress of this astonishing chain beyond the limits of this terrestrial globe with the naked eye ; but through the perspective of analogy and conjecture, we may perceive that it ascends a great deal higher, to the inhabitants of other planets, to angels, and archangels, the lowest orders of whom may be united by a like easy transition with the highest of our own, in whom to reason may be added intuitive knowledge, insight into futurity, with innumerable other faculties of which we are unable to form the least idea ; through whom it may ascend, by gradations almost infinite, to those most exalted of created beings, who are seated on the footstool of the celestial throne.

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DISQUISITION II.

ON CRUELTY TO INFERIOR ANIMALS.

MAN is that link of the chain of universal existence, by which spiritual and corporeal beings are united: as the numbers and variety of the latter his inferiors are almost infinite, so probably are those of the former his superiors; and as we see that the lives and happiness of those below us are dependent on our wills, we may reasonably conclude, that our lives and happiness are equally dependent on the wills of those above us; accountable, like ourselves, for the use of this power, to the Supreme Creator and Governor of all things. Should this analogy be well founded, how criminal will our account appear, when laid before that just and impartial judge! How will man, that sanguinary tyrant, be able to excuse himself from the charge of those innumerable

merable cruelties inflicted on his unoffending subjects committed to his care, formed for his benefit, and placed under his authority by their common father? whose mercy is over all his works, and who expects that this authority should be exercised not only with tenderness and mercy, but in conformity to the laws of justice and gratitude.

But to what horrid deviations from these benevolent intentions are we daily witnesses! No small part of mankind derive their chief amusements from the deaths and sufferings of inferior animals; a much greater, consider them only as engines of wood or iron, useful in their several occupations. The carman drives his horse, and the carpenter his nail, by repeated blows; and so long as these produce the desired effect, and they both go, they neither reflect or care whether either of them have any sense of feeling. The butcher knocks down the stately ox with no more compassion than the blacksmith hammers a horse-shoe, and plunges his knife into the throat of the innocent lamb,

lamb, with as little reluctance as the taylor sticks his needle into the collar of a coat.

If there are some few, who, formed in a softer mould, view with pity the sufferings of these defenceless creatures, there is scarce one who entertains the least idea, that justice or gratitude can be due to their merits or their services. The social and friendly dog is hanged without remorse, if, by barking in defence of his master's person and property, he happens unknowingly to disturb his rest; the generous horse, who has carried his ungrateful master for many years with ease and safety, worn out with age and infirmities contracted in his service, is by him condemned to end his miserable days in a dust-cart, where the more he exerts his little remains of spirit, the more he is whipped, to save his stupid driver the trouble of whipping some other, less obedient to the lash. Sometimes, having been taught the practice of many unnatural and useless feats in a riding-house, he is at last turned out and consigned to the dominion of a hackney-coachman, by whom

whom he is every day corrected for performing those tricks, which he has learned under so long and severe a discipline. The sluggish bear, in contradiction to his nature, is taught to dance, for the diversion of a malignant mob, by placing red-hot irons under his feet ; and the majestic bull is tortured by every mode which malice can invent, for no offence but that he is gentle, and unwilling to assail his diabolical tormentors. These, with innumerable other acts of cruelty, injustice, and ingratitude, are every day committed, not only with impunity, but without censure, and even without observation ; but we may be assured, that they cannot finally pass away unnoticed and unretaliated.

The laws of self-defence undoubtedly justify us in destroying those animals who would destroy us, who injure our properties, or annoy our persons ; but not even these, whenever their situation incapacitates them from hurting us. I know of no right which we have to shoot a bear on an inaccessible island of ice, or an eagle on the mountain's
top,

top, whose lives cannot injure us, nor deaths procure us any benefit. We are unable to give life, and therefore ought not wantonly to take it away from the meanest insect, without sufficient reason; they all receive it from the same benevolent hand as ourselves, and have therefore an equal right to enjoy it.

God has been pleased to create numberless animals intended for our sustenance; and that they are so intended, the agreeable flavour of their flesh to our palates, and the wholesome nutriment which it administers to our stomachs, are sufficient proofs: these, as they are formed for our use, propagated by our culture, and fed by our care, we have certainly a right to deprive of life, because it is given and preserved to them on that condition; but this should always be performed with all the tenderness and compassion which so disagreeable an office will permit; and no circumstances ought to be omitted, which can render their executions as quick and easy as possible. For this,

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providence

providence has wisely and benevolently provided, by forming them in such a manner, that their flesh becomes rancid and unpalatable by a painful and lingering death ; and has thus compelled us to be merciful without compassion, and cautious of their suffering, for the sake of ourselves ; but, if there are any whose tastes are so vitiated, and whose hearts are so hardened, as to delight in such inhuman sacrifices, and to partake of them without remorse, they should be looked upon as dæmons in human shapes, and expect a retaliation of those tortures which they have inflicted on the innocent, for the gratification of their own depraved and unnatural appetites.

So violent are the passions of anger and revenge in the human breast, that it is not wonderful that men should persecute their real or imaginary enemies with cruelty and malevolence ; but that there should exist in nature a being who can receive pleasure from giving pain, would be totally incredible, if we were not convinced, by melancholy

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choly experience, that there are not only many, but that this unaccountable disposition is in some manner inherent in the nature of man ; for, as he cannot be taught by example, nor led to it by temptation, or prompted to it by interest, it must be derived from his native constitution ; and is a remarkable confirmation of what revelation so frequently inculcates—that he brings into the world with him an original depravity, the effects of a fallen and degenerate state ; in proof of which we need only observe, that the nearer he approaches to a state of nature, the more predominant this disposition appears, and the more violently it operates. We see children laughing at the miseries which they inflict on every unfortunate animal which comes within their power : all savages are ingenious in contriving, and happy in executing the most exquisite tortures ; and the common people of all countries are delighted with nothing so much as bull-baitings, prize-fightings, executions, and all spectacles of cruelty and horror. Though
civilization

civilization may in some degree abate this native ferocity, it can never quite extirpate it; the most polished are not ashamed to be pleased with scenes of little less barbarity, and, to the disgrace of human nature, to dignify them with the name of sports. They arm cocks with artificial weapons, which nature had kindly denied to their malevolence, and with shouts of applause and triumph, see them plunge them into each other's hearts: they view with delight the trembling deer and defenceless hare, flying for hours in the utmost agonies of terror and despair, and at last, sinking under fatigue, devoured by their merciless pursuers; they see with joy the beautiful pheasant and harmless partridge drop from their flight, weltering in their blood, or perhaps perishing with wounds and hunger, under the cover of some friendly thicket to which they have in vain retreated for safety; they triumph over the unsuspecting fish, whom they have decoyed by an insidious pretence of feeding, and drag him from his native

element by a hook fixed to and tearing out his entrails; and to add to all this, they spare neither labour nor expence to preserve and propagate these innocent animals, for no other end but to multiply the objects of their persecution.

What name should we bestow on a superior being, whose whole endeavours were employed, and whose whole pleasure consisted in terrifying, ensnaring, tormenting, and destroying mankind? whose superior faculties were exerted in fomenting animosities amongst them, in contriving engines of destruction, and inciting them to use them in maiming and murdering each other? whose power over them was employed in assisting the rapacious, deceiving the simple, and oppressing the innocent? who, without provocation or advantage, should continue from day to day, void of all pity and remorse, thus to torment mankind for diversion, and at the same time endeavour with the utmost care to preserve their lives, and to propagate their species, in order to increase

crease the number of victims devoted to his malevolence, and be delighted in proportion to the miseries which he occasioned? I say, what name detestable enough could we find for such a being? Yet, if we impartially consider the case, and our intermediate situation, we must acknowledge that, with regard to inferior animals, just such a being is a sportsman.

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DISQUISITION III.

ON A PRÆ-EXISTENT STATE.

THAT mankind had existed in some state previous to the present, was the opinion of the wisest sages of the most remote antiquity. It was held by the Gymnosophists of Egypt, the Brachmans of India, the Magi of Persia, and the greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome ; it was likewise adopted by the fathers of the christian church, and frequently enforced by her primitive writers ; why it has been so little noticed, so much overlooked, rather than rejected, by the divines and metaphysicians of later ages, I am at a loss to account for, as it is undoubtedly confirmed by reason, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation.

In the first place then it is confirmed by reason, which teaches us that it is impossible
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that the conjunction of a male and female can create, or bring into being an immortal soul; they may prepare a material habitation for it; but there must be an immaterial præ-existent inhabitant ready to take possession. Reason assures us, that an immortal soul, which will exist eternally after the dissolution of the body, must have eternally existed before the formation of it; for whatever has no end, can never have had any beginning, but must exist in some manner which bears no relation to time, to us totally incomprehensible; if therefore the soul will continue to exist in a future life, it must have existed in a former. Reason likewise tells us, that an omnipotent and benevolent Creator would never have formed such a world as this, and filled it with such inhabitants, if the present was the only, or even the first state of their existence, a state which, if unconnected with the past and the future, seems calculated for no one purpose intelligible to our understandings; neither of good or evil, of happiness or misery, of vir-

tue or vice, of reward or punishment, but a confused jumble of them altogether, proceeding from no visible cause, and tending to no end. But, as we are certain that infinite power cannot be employed without effect, nor infinite wisdom without design, we may rationally conclude, that this world could be designed for nothing more than a prison, in which we are awhile confined to receive punishment for the offences committed in a former, and an opportunity of preparing ourselves for the enjoyment of happiness in a future life.

Secondly, These conclusions of reason are sufficiently confirmed by the face of nature and the appearances of things ; this world is evidently formed for a place of punishment as well as probation ; a prison, or house of correction, to which we are committed, some for a longer, and some for a shorter period ; some to the severest labour, others to more indulgent tasks ; and if we consider it under this character, we shall perceive it admirably fitted for the end for which it was intended

tended. It is a spacious, beautiful, and durable structure; it contains many various apartments, a few very comfortable, many tolerable, and some extremely wretched; it is inclosed with a fence so impassable, that none can surmount it but with the loss of life. Its inhabitants likewise exactly resemble those of other prisons: they come in with malignant dispositions, and unruly passions, from whence, like other confined criminals, they receive great part of their punishment by abusing and injuring each other. As we may suppose, that they have not all been equally guilty, so they are not all equally miserable; the majority are permitted to procure a tolerable subsistence by their labour, and pass through their confinement without any extraordinary penalties, except from paying their fees, at their discharge by death. Others, who perhaps stand in need of more severe chastisement, receive it by a variety of methods; some by the most acute, and some by the most tedious pains and diseases; some by disappointments, and many

by success, in their favourite pursuits ; some by being condemned to situations peculiarly unfortunate, as to those of extreme poverty, or superabundant riches, of despicable meanness, or painful pre-eminence, of galley-slaves in a despotic, or ministers in a free country. If we survey the various regions of the globe, what dreadful scenes of wretchedness every where present themselves to our eyes ! in some, we see thousands chained to the oar, and perpetually suffering from the inclemency of all weathers, and their more inclement masters ; in some, not fewer condemned to wear out their miserable lives in dreary mines, deprived of air and day-light ; and in others, much greater numbers torn from their native country, their families, and friends, and sold to the most inhuman of all tyrants, under whose lash they are worn out with fatigue, or expire in torments. The history of mankind is indeed little more than a detail of their miseries, some inflicted by the hand of providence, and many more by their own wickedness, and mutual ill-usage.

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As nations, we see them sometimes chastised by plagues, famines, inundations, and earthquakes ; and continually destroying each other with fire and sword ; we see fleets and armies combating with savage fury, and employing against each other every instrument of torture and death, which malevolence can invent, or ferocity make use of : we see the dying and the dead huddled together in heaps, and weltering in each other's blood ; and can we be spectators of this horrid tragedy, without considering the performers as condemned criminals, compelled, like the gladiators of the ancients, to receive their punishment from each other's hands ? The orator, the poet, and the historian may celebrate them, as heroes fighting for the rights and liberties of their respective countries ; but the christian philosopher can look upon them in no other light than as condemned spirits exiled into human flesh, and sent into this world to chastise each other for past offences. As individuals, we see men afflicted with innumerable diseases, which proceed

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not from accident, but are congenial with their original formations, and evidently the dispositions of providence, designed for the most important ends; the stone grows in the human bladder, under the same direction as in the quarry, and the seeds of scurvy, rheumatism, and gout are sown in the blood by the same omnipotent hand, which has scattered those of vegetables over the face of the earth. From these various instruments of torture, numberless are the miseries which mankind endure; nor are those perhaps less numerous, though less visible, which they suffer from that treachery, injustice, ingratitude, ill-humour, and perverseness, with which they every hour torment one another, interrupt the peace of society, and imbitter the comforts of domestic life; to all which we may add, that wonderful ingenuity which they possess, of creating imaginary, in the absence of real misfortunes, and that corrosive quality in the human mind, which, for want of the proper food of business or contemplation,

preys upon itself, and makes solitude intolerable, and thinking a most painful task. Who, that surveys this melancholy picture of the present life, can entertain a doubt, but that it is intended for a state of punishment, and therefore must be subsequent to some former, in which this punishment was deserved.

Lastly. The opinion of præ-existence is no less confirmed by revelation than by reason, and the appearances of things; for, although perhaps it is no where in the New Testament explicitly enforced, yet throughout the whole tenour of those writings it is every where implied: in them mankind are constantly represented as coming into the world under a load of guilt; as condemned criminals, the children of wrath, and objects of divine indignation; placed in it for a time by the mercies of God, to give them an opportunity of expiating this guilt by sufferings, and regaining, by a pious and virtuous conduct, their lost state of happiness and innocence: this is stiled working out their salvation,

salvation, not preventing their condemnation, for that is already past, and their only hope now is redemption, that is, being rescued from a state of captivity and sin, in which they are universally involved. This is the very essence of the christian dispensation, and the grand principle in which it differs from the religion of nature; in every other respect they are nearly similar; they both enjoin the same moral duties, and prohibit the same vices; both inculcate the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments; but here they essentially disagree; natural religion informs us, that a just and benevolent Creator could have no other design in placing us in this world, but to make us happy, and that, if we commit no extraordinary crimes, we may hope to be so in another; but christianity teaches a severer and more alarming lesson, and acquaints us, that we are admitted into this life oppressed with guilt and depravity, which we must atone for by suffering its usual calamities, and work off by acts of positive virtue, before

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we can hope for happiness in another. Now, if by all this a præ-existent state is not constantly supposed, that is, that mankind have existed in some state previous to the present, in which this guilt was incurred, and this depravity contracted, there can be no meaning at all, or such a meaning as contradicts every principle of common sense—that guilt can be contracted without acting, or that we can act without existing : so undeniable is this inference, that it renders any positive assertion of a præ-existent state totally useless ; as, if a man at the moment of his entrance into a new country was declared a criminal, it would surely be unnecessary to assert, that he had lived in some other before he came there.

In all our researches into abstruse subjects, there is a certain clue, without which, the further we proceed the more we are bewildered, but which being fortunately discovered, leads us at once through the whole labyrinth, puts an end to our difficulties, and opens a system perfectly clear, consistent,

ent, and intelligible. The doctrine of præ-existence, or the acknowledgment of some past state of guilt and disobedience, I take to be this very clue; which, if we constantly carry along with us, we shall proceed unembarrassed through all the intricate mysteries both of nature and revelation, and at last arrive at so clear a prospect of the wise and just dispensations of our Creator, as cannot fail to afford compleat satisfaction to the most inquisitive sceptic.

For instance; Are we unable to answer that important question, Whence came evil? that is, why a Creator of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, should have formed a world replete with so many imperfections, and those so productive of calamities to its inhabitants? this clue will direct us to this satisfactory reply, as far as the question relates to the evils of the present life—because he designed it for a place of punishment and probation, for which it is perfectly adapted; and we can be no more surpris'd to see such a world as this make a part of the universal system,

system, than to see a magnificent prison with all its appendages of punishment, whips, pillories, and gibbets, make a part of a large, populous, and well-governed city. Are we under difficulties to comprehend why the same omnipotent and benevolent Creator should fill this world with inhabitants so wicked, and so miserable? this clue will immediately lead us to a solution of them, and point out the true reason—because they are sent hither to be punished and reformed. Do we reject all those passages in the New Testament as derogatory to the divine wisdom and goodness, which declare, that mankind come into this world under a load of guilt and depravity, and under the displeasure of their Creator?—no sooner are we brought by this clue within sight of a præ-existent state, in which this guilt and depravity may have been contracted, but our incredulity vanishes, and we perceive plainly, that their admission into this world, under those circumstances, is not only consistent with the justice of God, but the strongest instance

instance of his mercy and benevolence; as by it they are enabled to purge off this depravity, to expiate their offences, and to re-instate themselves in his favour.

Thus is a *præ*-existent state, I think, clearly demonstrated, by the principles of reason, the appearances of things, and the sense of revelation; all which agree, that this world is intended for a place of punishment, as well as probation, and must therefore refer to some former period; for, as probation implies a future life, for which it is preparatory, so punishment must imply a former state, in which offences were committed, for which it is due; and indeed there is not a single argument drawn from the justice of God, and the seemingly undeserved sufferings of many in the present state, which can be urged in proof of a future life, which proves not with superior force the existence of another, which is already past.

DISQUISITION IV.

ON THE NATURE OF TIME.

WE are so accustomed to connect our ideas of time with the history of what passes in it, that is, to mistake a succession of thoughts and actions for time, that we find it extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, totally to separate or distinguish them from each other : and indeed, had we power to effect this in our minds, all human language is so formed, that it would fail us in our expression : yet certain it is, that time, abstracted from the thoughts, actions, and motions which pass in it, is actually nothing : it is only the mode in which some created beings are ordained to exist, but in itself has really no existence at all.

Though this opinion may seem chimerical to many, who have not much considered the subject, yet it is by no means new, for it was

long since adopted by some of the most celebrated philosophers of antiquity, particularly by the Epicureans; and is thus well expressed by Lucretius :

*Tempus item per se non est ; sed rebus ab ipsis
Consequitur sensus, transactum quod sit in ævo,
Tum quæ res instat, quid porro deinde sequatur ;
Nec per se, quemquam tempus sentire, fatendum est,
Semotum ab usum, motu, plâcidaque quiete.*

Time of itself is nothing ; but from thought
Receives its rise, by lab'ring fancy wrought,
From things considered : while we think on some
As present, some as past, and some to come :
No thought can think on Time, that's still confess'd,
But thinks on things in motion, or at rest.

CREECH.

From observing the diurnal revolutions of the sun, and the various transactions which pass during those revolutions, we acquire conceptions of days ; by dividing these days we form hours, minutes, and seconds ; and by multiplying them, months, years, and ages ; then by measuring these imaginary periods against each other, and bestowing
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on each distinct denominations, we give them the appearance of something real: yesterday, which is past, and to-morrow, which is not yet come, assume the same reality as the present day; and thus we imagine time to resemble a great book, one of whose pages is every day wrote on, and the rest remain blank, to be filled up in their turns with the events of futurity; whilst in fact this is all but the delusion of our own imaginations, and time is nothing more than the manner in which past, present, and future events succeed each other: yet is this delusion so correspondent with our present state, and so woven up with all human language, that without much reflection it cannot be perceived, nor when perceived can it be remedied; nor can I, while endeavouring to prove time to be nothing, avoid treating it as something in almost every line.

There seems to be in the nature of things two modes of existence; one, in which all events, past, present, and to come, appear in one view; which, if the expression may be

allowed, I shall call perpetually instantaneous ; and which, as I apprehend, constitutes Eternity : the other, in which all things are presented separately and successively, which produces what we call Time.

Of the first of these human reason can afford us no manner of conception ; yet it assures us, on the strongest evidence, that such must be the existence of the Supreme Creator of all things, that such probably may be the existence of many superior orders of created beings, and that such possibly may be our own in another state : to beings so constituted, all events past, present, and future are presented in one congregated mass, which to us are spread out in succession to adapt them to our temporary mode of perception : in these ideas have no succession, and therefore to their thoughts, actions, or existence, time, which is succession only, can bear not the least relation whatsoever. To existence of this kind alone can eternity belong ; for eternity can never be composed of finite parts, which, however multiplied, can
never

never become infinite; but must be something simple, uniform, invariable, and indivisible; permanent, though instantaneous, and endless without progression. There are some remarkable expressions both in the Old and New Testament, alluding to this mode of existence; in the former, God is denominated *I am**; and in the latter, Christ says, *Before Abraham was, I am*†: both evidently implying duration without succession: from whence the schoolmen probably derive their obscure notions of such a kind of duration, which they explain by the more obscure term of a *punctum stans*.

With the other mode of existence we are sufficiently acquainted, being that in which Providence has placed us, and all things around us, during our residence on this terrestrial globe; in which all ideas follow each other in our minds in a regular and uniform succession, not unlike the tickings of a clock; and by that means all objects are

* Exod. iv. 14.

† John viii. 58.

presented to our imaginations in the same progressive manner: and if any vary much from that destined pace, by too rapid, or too slow a motion, they immediately become to us totally imperceptible. We now perceive every one, as it passes, through a small aperture separately, as in the camera obscura, and this we call time; but at the conclusion of this state we may probably exist in a manner quite different; the window may be thrown open, the whole prospect appear at one view, and all this apparatus, which we call time, be totally done away: for time is certainly nothing more, than the shifting of scenes necessary for the performance of this tragi-comical farce, which we are here exhibiting, and must undoubtedly end with the conclusion of the drama. It has no more a real essence, independent of thought and action, than sight, hearing, and smell have, independent of their proper organs, and the animals to whom they belong; and when they cease to exist, time can be no more. There are also several passages in

in the scriptures, declaring this annihilation of time, at the consummation of all things : *And the Angel, which I saw stand upon the sea and the earth, lifted up his hand towards heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, &c. that there should be time no longer**.

To this opinion of the non-entity of time it has by some been objected, that time has many attributes and powers inherent in its nature ; and that whatever has attributes and powers, must itself exist : it is infinite, say they, and eternal ; it contains all things ; and forces itself on our imaginations in the absence of all other existence. But to this it may be answered, that the human mind is able in the very same manner to realize nothing ; and then all the same attributes and powers are applicable with equal propriety to that nothing, thus supposed to be something :

† Nothing, thou elder brother ev'n to shade !
Thou had'st a being, ere the world was made,
And well fix'd are alone of ending not afraid.

* Rev. x. 5.

† Lord Rochester.

Nothing is infinite, and eternal; that is, hath neither beginning nor end: it contains all things; that is, it begins where all existence ends, and therefore furrounds and contains all things: it forces itself on the mind, in the absence of all existence; that is, where we suppose there is no existence, we must suppose there is nothing: this exact resemblance of their attributes and powers, more plainly demonstrates, that time is nothing.

From this non-existence of time thus established, many conclusions will arise, both useful and entertaining; from whence perhaps new lights may be thrown on several speculations religious and metaphysical, whose outlines I shall just venture to trace, and leave them to be filled up by abler pens.

1st. If time be no more than the succession of ideas and actions, however these may be accelerated or retarded, time will be just the same: that is, neither longer or shorter, provided the same ideas and actions succeed one another, as far, I mean, as it relates to
being

beings so thinking and acting. For instance, were the earth and all the celestial bodies to perform the same revolutions in one day, which they now perform in a whole year, and were all the ideas, actions, and lives of mankind hastened on in the same proportion, the period of our lives would not be in the least shortened; but that day would be exactly equal to the present year: if in the space of seventy or eighty of these days a man was born, educated, and grown up, had exercised a profession, had seen his children come to maturity, his grandchildren succeed them, and, during this period, had had all his ideas and actions, all his enjoyments and sufferings, accelerated in the same proportion, he would not only seem to himself, and to all who lived in the same state with him, and measured time by the same standard, to have lived as long, but actually and in fact would have lived as long as one who resides on this globe as great a number of our present years.

2dly. This being the case, it follows, that
the

the life of every man must be longer or shorter, in proportion to the number of his thoughts and actions ; for was it possible for a man to think and act as much in an hour as in a year, that hour, as far as it related to him, would not only seem, but actually become a year. On the other hand, was it possible for a man totally to abstain from thinking and acting for an hour, or a year, time, with regard to him, for that period, would have no existence ; or, could he keep one idea fixed in his mind, and continue one single act during the same space, time, which is a succession only of ideas and actions, must be equally annihilated : whether these ideas and actions are exercised on great or little occasions, whether they are productive of pleasing or painful sensations, with regard to this purpose their effects will be the same ; neither their importance or consequences will add any thing to time, but their numbers and celerity most undoubtedly will. Our lives, therefore, when diversified with a variety of objects, and busied in a multiplicity

city of pursuits, though perhaps less happy, will certainly be longer, than when dosed away in sloth, inactivity, and apathy.

3dly. From hence it is evident, that we can form no judgment of the duration of the lives, enjoyments, and sufferings of other animals, with the progression of whose ideas we are totally unacquainted, and who may be framed in that respect, as well as in many others, so widely different from ourselves. The gaudy butterfly, that flutters in the sunshine but for a few months, may live as long as the stupid tortoise that breathes for a century; the insect, that survives not one diurnal revolution of the sun, may, for any thing we know, enjoy an age of happiness; and the miserable horse, that appears to us to suffer the drudgery of ten or twenty years, may finish his laborious task in as many months, days, or hours.

4thly. For the like reasons we can judge but very imperfectly of what are real evils in the universal system, whilst we remain in this temporal state of existence, in which all things are exhibited to us by scraps, one after

after the other ; for these detached portions, which viewed separately, seem but misshapen blotches, may to beings, who in an eternal state see past, present, and future, all delineated on one canvass, appear as well-disposed shades necessary to render perfect the whole most beautiful landskip. Nay, even pain, that taken singly is so pungent and disagreeable a potion, when thrown into the cup of universal happiness, may, perhaps, add to it a flavour, which without this infusion it could not have acquired.

5thly. If time has itself no existence, it can never put an end to the existence of any thing else ; and this seems no inconclusive argument for the immortality of the soul ; for if any thing is, and no cause appears to us why it should cease to be, we can have no good reason to believe that it will not continue. Whatever has no connection with time must be eternal : now the only property of the soul, with which we are acquainted, is thought, which bears no relation to time ; whence it is reasonable to suppose,

suppose, that the soul itself is equally unconnected with it, and consequently eternal. Even in material beings we see continual mutations, but can perceive no symptoms of annihilation; and therefore we have surely less cause to suspect it in immaterial: from whence I am inclined to think, that the essences of all things are eternal, that is, unrelative to time, and that it is only our manner of perceiving them, that causes them to appear temporal to us; past, present, and future being not inherent in their natures, but only in our progressive mode of perception.

6thly. From what has been said, we may perceive into what amazing absurdities many of our ablest divines and metaphysicians have plunged, in their investigations of eternity; for making which their receipt is usually this: they take of time a sufficient quantity, and, chopping it in small pieces, they dispose them in imaginary lengths, which they distinguish by the names of minutes, hours, days, years, and ages; then
feeling

feeling in their own minds a power of multiplying these as often as they think fit, they heap millions upon millions ; and finding this power to be a machine that may be worked backwards and forwards with equal facility, they extend their line both ways, and so their eternity is compleated, and fit for use : they then divide it in the middle, and out of a single eternity they make two, as they term them, *a parte ante*, and *a parte post* ; each of which having one end, may be drawn out, like a juggler's ribband, as long as they please. The contradictions so manifest in this system, sufficiently declare its falshood ; for in adopting it we must acknowledge, that each half of this eternity is equal to the whole ; that in each the number of days cannot exceed that of the months, nor the months be more numerous than the years, they being all alike infinite ; that whether it commenced yesterday, or ten thousand years since, the length of its duration must be the same ; for the length depends not on the beginning, but on the end, but that

that cannot be different, where there is no end at all : the absurdity of all these propositions is too glaring to stand in need of any refutation ; for it is evident, that whatever contains parts, length, or numbers, can never be infinite ; whatever had a beginning must have an end, because beginning and ending are the modes of temporary existence : what has no end could have no beginning, because both are equally inconsistent with eternity. In truth, all these absurdities arise from applying to eternity our ideas of time, which, being two modes of existence intirely different, bear not the least relation to each other : time is in its nature finite and successive ; eternity infinite and instantaneous ; and therefore their properties are no more applicable to each other, than those of sounds to colours, or of colours to sounds ; and we can no more form eternity out of time, than, by mixing red, blue, and green, we can compose an anthem or an opera.

7thly.

7thly. From hence appears the necessity, in our considerations on these subjects, of keeping our ideas of these two modes of existence intirely and constantly distinct, as they themselves are in nature; by which means we shall presently sweep away many of those theological and metaphysical cobwebs, which now encumber and disgrace our most learned libraries; and cut short many impertinent enquiries concerning the creation of the universe, God's foreknowledge and predestination, the præ-existent and future state of souls, the injustice of eternal punishments, and the sleep of the soul, with numberless others of the same kind, all derived from injudiciously blending, and confounding these two kinds of existence together, and applying notions and expressions to one, which can only with propriety belong to the other.

To enter largely into these abstruse and intricate subjects, would require a folio; I shall therefore only say one word or two to each.

It

It has been frequently asked, why God created the universe at the time in which he did create it, and why he suffered millions of ages to pass away before the commencement of so glorious a work? to this it may be replied with equal conciseness and truth, that in fact no such ages ever did or could pass before it was created; nor was it created in any time at all; for neither the essence or actions of God have the most distant relation to time; he has been pleased in his infinite wisdom to bestow on some parts of his creation a temporal mode of existence, and from this alone time derives its origin: to suppose time antecedent to temporal existence, is to suppose effects to precede their causes; and not less absurd than to imagine, that there could be perception before sensitive beings, or thought before intelligent beings existed. This very question proves the absurdity of connecting time and eternity together; for if God's power of creating is coæval with his existence, that existence eternal, and that eternity only time extended; this evident

contradiction follows, that God, though always equally able, yet in fact never could create any thing so soon, but that he might have created it sooner : that is in other words, that he never could create any thing as soon as he could. All this puzzle arises from our foolishly supposing, that eternal and temporal beings must act in a manner similar to each other : if we do any thing, it must be done at some time or other ; but God acts in ways as different from ours, as inconceivable to us ; his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts : one day is to him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ; that is, neither of them, with his manner of existing, thinking, or acting, have any connection whatever.

All disputes about God's foreknowledge and predestination, are of the same species, and derive their birth entirely from the same absurd supposition. Foreknowledge and predestination imply succession, and are relative to time, which has no relation to the essence or perception of the Creator of all things ; and therefore, in the sense usually applied to them,

them, cannot with any propriety be attributed to him. He knows all things, and ordains all things; but as all things are equally present to the divine intuition, it is impossible that he can foreknow or predestinate any thing.

Of the same kind are all questions concerning the præ-existent and future state of the soul, arising likewise from confounding our ideas of these two modes of existence, temporal and eternal: whenever the soul is united with a body, perceiving all things by succession through material organs, it acquires ideas of time, and can form none of existence unconnected with it; but whenever this union is dissolved, it probably returns again to its native mode of eternal existence, in which the whole circle of its perception being at once visible, it has nothing further to do with time; it is neither old or young, it lives no more in the seventeenth than in the seventh century, no nearer to the end than the beginning of the world: all ideas of years and ages, of præ-existence

and futurity, of beginning and ending, will be totally obliterated ; and possibly it will be as incapable of forming any conceptions of time, as it is now of eternity. The soul, therefore, being quite unconnected with time, whenever it is unconnected with a body, cannot properly be said to exist in another time, either prior or posterior, but only in another manner.

Every argument also endeavouring to prove the injustice and disproportion of eternal punishments for temporal offences, is founded on the same erroneous principles, and admits of the same answer ; that all computations of the magnitude of such punishments from their duration, by heaping years and ages upon each other, are absurd, and inconsistent with that state in which they are to be inflicted : crimes will there be punished according to the degrees of their malignity, but neither for a long, or a short, nor for any time at all : for all punishments must be correspondent to the state in which they are suffered : in an eternal state, they must be eternal, in a temporal

poral they must be temporal; for it is equally impossible, that a being can be punished for a time, where no time is, as that it should be punished everlastingly in a state which itself cannot last. As therefore, from the nature of things, this dispensation is necessary, it cannot be unjust, and from the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Author of nature, we may reasonably presume that it cannot be disproportioned to its several objects.

The non-entity of time will serve likewise to settle a late ingenious controversy, and shew, that, like most others of the kind, it is a dispute only upon words: this controversy is concerning the sleep of the soul; that is, whether it enters into a state of happiness or misery immediately on its dissolution from the body, or remains in a state of profound insensibility till the general judgment, and then receives its final sentence, and suffers its execution: for if time is nothing but the thoughts and actions which pass in it, the condition of the soul, whether

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it sleeps or not, will be exactly the same; nor will the final sentence be one moment deferred by such a state of insensibility, how long soever it may continue; for though, during that period, many revolutions of the sun, and of empires, may take place, many millions of thoughts and actions may pass, which not only measure time, but create it; yet with regard to the soul so sleeping, none of these, that is, no time will pass at all; and, if no time intervenes, judgment, however remote with regard to others, will as instantly follow its dissolution, as if that had happened the precedent moment. But if, according to the foregoing principles, the soul in a separate state bears no relation to time, then no event in which it is there concerned can be before or after another, either nearer or farther from any period, from death or judgment, from the creation or dissolution of this planetary system: this we see must at once put an end to all disputes on this subject, and render the use of soporifics entirely needless.

After

After all that has been here advanced, I am not insensible, that we are here so constantly conversant with temporal objects, and so totally unacquainted with eternal, that few, very few, will ever be able to abstract existence from time, or comprehend that any thing can exist out of, and unconnected with it: in vain should I suggest, that the various planets are peopled by the divine wisdom with a variety of beings, and even this terrestrial globe with innumerable creatures, whose situations are so different, that their manner of existence is quite unknown and incomprehensible to each other; that millions inhabit the impenetrable recesses of the unfathomable ocean, who can no more form conceptions of any existence beyond the limits of that their native element, than we ourselves can beyond the boundaries of time; and that therefore in reality, time may be no more necessary to existence than water, though the mode of that existence we are unable to comprehend. But, I well know, these analogous arguments have little

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weight;

weight; the prejudice of education, the strength of habit, and the force of language, all formed on the supposed union of existence with time, will persuade men to reject this hypothesis as vain and chimerical. To all busy men, and men of business, to all jogging on in the beaten roads of professions, or scrambling up the precipices of ambition, these considerations must appear unprofitable illusions, if not incomprehensible nonsense; for to endeavour to convince a merchant subsisting on long credit, a lawyer enriched by delay, a divine who has purchased a next presentation, a general who is in no hurry to fight, or a minister whose object is the continuance of his power, that time is nothing, is an arduous task, and very unlikely to be attended with success. Whoever desires to taste or understand such abstracted speculations, must leave for a while the noisy bustle of worldly occupations, and retire into the sequestered shades of solitude and contemplation: from whence he will return certainly not richer, possibly not wiser, but probably

bably more susceptible of amusement from his own company for want of better, and more able to draw entertainment from his own imaginations; which in his journey through life he will often find an acquisition not altogether inconsiderable.

DIS.

DISQUISITION V.

ON THE ANALOGY BETWEEN THINGS MATERIAL AND INTELLECTUAL.

AS all things, both material and intellectual, are derived from the same omnipotent author, we shall find, on an accurate examination, that there is a certain analogy, which runs through them all, well worthy of our attention and admiration ; that is, that there are in the elements of the material world, and in the passions and actions of mankind, powers and propensities of a similar nature, which operate in a similar manner, throughout every part of the material, moral, and political system. But this theory, rather abstruse, is difficult to be explained, and will be best elucidated by examples, which every day fall within our observation.

In the material world, for instance, we see
all

all disorders cured by their own excesses : a sultry calm fails not to produce a storm, which dissipates the noxious vapours, and restores a purer air ; the fiercest tempest, exhausted by its own violence, at length subsides ; and an intense sun-shine, whilst it parches up the thirsty earth, exhales clouds, which quickly water it with refreshing showers. Just so in the moral world, all our passions and vices, by their excesses, defeat themselves ; excessive rage renders men impotent to execute the mischiefs which they threaten ; repeated treacheries make them unable to deceive, because none will trust them ; and extreme profligacy, by the diseases which it occasions, destroys their appetites, and works an unwilling reformation.

As in the natural world, the elements are restrained in their most destructive effects, by their mutual opposition ; so in the moral, are the vices of mankind prevented from being totally subversive of society, by their continually counteracting each other : profusion restores to the public the wealth
which

which avarice has detained from it for a time ; envy clips the towering wings of ambition ; and even revenge, by its terrors, prevents many injuries and oppressions : the treachery of the thief discovers his accomplices ; the perfidy of the prostitute brings the highwayman to justice ; and the villainy of the assassin puts an end to the cruelty of a tyrant.

In the material world, the middle climates, farthest removed from the extremes of heat and cold, are the most salubrious and most pleasant ; so in life, the middle ranks are ever most favourable to virtue, and to happiness ; which dwell not in the extremes of poverty or riches.

As throughout the various regions of the earth, advantages and inconveniences are distributed with a more impartial hand than we on a transitory view are apt to imagine ; so are they to the various conditions of human life : if the more southern climates are gilded with a brighter sun-shine, perfumed with more fragrant gales, and decorated with
a greater

a greater profusion of plants and flowers, they are at the same time perpetually exposed to pestilential heats, infested with noxious animals, torn by hurricanes, and rocked by earthquakes, unknown to the rougher regions of the north. In like manner, if the rich enjoy luxuries, from which the poor are debarred, they suffer many diseases and disquietudes, from which those are fortunately exempted.

We behold with admiration the vivid azure of the vaulted sky, and variegated colours of the distant clouds ; but, if we approach them on the summit of some lofty mountain, we discover that the beautiful scene is all illusion, and find ourselves involved only in a dreary fog or a tempestuous whirlwind : just so, in youth, we look up with pleasing expectation to the pleasures and honours, which we fondly imagine will attend maturer age ; at which, if we arrive, the brilliant prospect vanishes in disappointment, and we meet with nothing more than a dull inactivity or turbulent contentions.

The

The properties of the various seasons of the year, the gaiety of spring, the vigour of summer, the serenity of autumn, and the gloom of winter, have been so often assimilated to the corresponding periods of human life; the dangers and disquietudes of grandeur so often compared to the tempestuous situation of lofty mountains; and the quiet safety of inferior stations, to the calm security of the humbler vale, that a repetition of them here would be impertinent, and useless; yet they all contribute to point out that analogy which uniformly pervades every part of the creation with which we are acquainted.

Between the material and political world, this analogy is still more conspicuous: in the former, every particle of matter, of which the vast machine is composed, is actuated by that wonderful principle of attraction, which restrains, impels, and directs its progress to the destined end; in the latter, every individual of which the great political body is formed, is actuated by self-interest, a principle ex-

actly similar, which, by a constant endeavour to draw all things to itself, restrains, impels, and directs his passions, designs, and actions to the important ends of government and society. As the first operates with force in proportion to the contents of the body in which it resides, so does the latter; in individuals it is small, in societies greater, and in populous and extensive empires most powerful. As the one acts with power in proportion to its distance, so does the other; for we constantly find, that a small benefit bestowed on men as individuals, will influence them much more than a larger, which they may receive from national prosperity; and a trifling loss, which immediately affects themselves, is more regretted, than one more considerable, which they feel only through the medium of public calamities. In another respect, also, they greatly resemble each other; they are both productive of many mischiefs, yet both necessary to the well-being and preservation of the whole. It is attraction that plunges us in the ocean; dashes

dashes us against the rocks ; tumbles us
 from the precipice ; and pulls down the tot-
 tering fabric on our heads : but it is this,
 also, that constitutes all body, that binds to-
 gether the terrestrial globe, guides the re-
 volving planets in their courses, and without
 it not only the whole material system would
 be dissolved, but I am inclined to think,
 that matter itself must be annihilated ; for,
 matter being infinitely divisible, without this
 property it must be infinitely divided ; and
 infinite division seems to be nothing less than
 annihilation : for without attraction there
 could be no cohesion, without cohesion no so-
 lidity, and without solidity no matter. In like
 manner, self-interest, or what we mistake for
 it, is the source of all our crimes, and most
 of our sufferings. It is this that seduces
 the profligate, by the prospect of pleasure ;
 tempts the villain by the hopes of gain ; and
 bribes the hero with the voice of fame : but
 it is this also that is the source of all our
 connections, civil, religious, political, and
 commercial ; that binds us together in fa-
 milies, in cities, and in nations, and directs
 our

our united labours to the public benefit : and without its influence, arts and learning, trade and manufactures, would be at an end, and all government, like matter by infinite division, would be annihilated.

The natural world subsists by a perpetual contention of the elements of which it is composed, the political by as constant a contest of its internal parties, struggling for superiority. In the former, the great system is carried on by a continual rotation of good and evil, alternately producing, and succeeding each other : continued sunshine produces tempests ; these discharge themselves in refreshing rains ; rains cause inundations, which, after some ravages, subsiding, assist commerce and agriculture, by scouring out the beds of rivers, and fertilizing lands ; and sunshine returns again : so in the latter, long peace, the political sunshine, generates corruption, luxury, and faction, the parents of destructive wars ; war for a time awakens national vigour, and pours down wealth and plunder, then causes inundations of poverty and dis-

tress ; distress calls forth industry, agriculture, and commerce, and peace returns once more.

As night and day, winter and summer, are alternately circulated over the various regions of the globe ; so are poverty and wealth, idleness and industry, ignorance and science, despotism and liberty, by an uniform process arising from their own natural constitutions, and their invariable effects upon each other. In poor countries, necessity incites industry, and cheapness of provisions invites traders and manufacturers to reside ; this soon introduces wealth, learning, and liberty ; and these are as soon followed by profusion, faction, and licentiousness ; commerce will keep no such company, but, like a bird of passage, migrates to climes by poverty and cheapness better adapted to her constitution : these, in their turns, grow rich, civilized, free, dissolute, and licentious in the same manner, and are successively deserted for the same reason, and the same circle is again renewed.

In

In the material world, the constant circulation of the air, and flux and reflux of the tides, preserve those elements from a putrid stagnation ; so in the political, controversies, civil and religious, keep up the spirits of national communities, and prevent them from sinking into a state of indolence and ignorance : but if either exceed the bounds of moderation, their consequences are extremely fatal ; the former producing storms and inundations, and the latter anarchy and confusion. Lord Bacon observes, that war is to states, what exercise is to individuals ; and in this they are extremely similar ; a proper proportion may contribute to health and vigour, but too much emaciates and wearsout a constitution.

Thus, by a wise and wonderful disposition of things material and intellectual, God has infused into them all powers and propensities greatly analogous, by which they are enabled and compelled, in a similar manner, to perform their respective parts in the general system, to restrain their own excesses,

and to call back each other, whenever they too far deviate from their destined ends; and has said unto every thing, as well as to the ocean, to night and day, to winter and summer, to heat and cold, to rain and sunshine, to happiness and misery, to science and ignorance, to war and peace, to liberty and despotism, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." These amazing instances of infinite wisdom in the œconomy of things, presenting every where an analogy so remarkable, are well worthy of our highest admiration; yet have been but little observed, because these divine dispositions appear to us to be no more than the necessary consequences of previous causes, and the invariable operations of nature, and we forget that nature is nothing more than the art of her omnipotent author.

DISQUISITION VI.

ON RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

TO several learned and ingenious writers, some doctrines of the Christian religion have appeared so contradictory to all the principles of reason and equity, that they cannot assent to them, nor believe that they can be derived from the fountain of all truth and justice. In order, therefore, to satisfy themselves and others, who may labour under the same difficulties, they have undertaken the arduous task of reconciling revelation and reason ; and great would have been their merits, had they begun at the right end, that is, had they endeavoured to exalt the human understanding to the comprehension of the sublime doctrines of the gospel, rather than to reduce those doctrines to the low standard of human reason ; but, unfortunately for themselves and many

others, they have made choice of the latter method, and, as the shortest way to effect it, have with inconsiderate rashness expunged from the New Testament every divine declaration, which agrees not exactly with their own notions of truth and rectitude ; and this they have attempted by no other means, than by absurd explanations, or by bold assertions that they are not there, in direct contradiction to the sense of language, and the whole tenour of those writings ; as some philosophers have ventured, in opposition to all men's senses, and even to their own, to deny the existence of matter, for no other reason, but because they find in it properties which they are unable to account for. Thus they have reduced Christianity to a mere system of ethics, and retain no part of it but the moral, which in fact is no characteristic part of it at all, as this, though in a manner less perfect, makes a part of every religion which ever appeared in the world. This ingenious method of converting Christianity into Deism, cannot fail of acquiring many respectable

respectable profelytes; for every virtuous and pious man, who would be a Christian if he could, that is, who reverences the name of Christianity, but cannot assent to its tenets, is glad to lift under the standard of any leader, who can teach him to be a Christian, without believing any one principle of that institution.

Whoever will look back into the theological annals of this country, will find, that during the last century, the fashionable philosophers were for the most part Atheists, who ascribed every thing to chance, fate, or necessity; exclusive of all intelligence or design: these mighty giants, who fought against Heaven, being at length overthrown by the absurdity of their own principles, and the superior abilities of their adversaries, retreated, about the beginning of the present, to the more tenable fort of Deism; but here again, being frequently worsted, they at last took shelter under the covert-way of rational Christianity, where they now make their stand, and attack revelation with less odium,

and more success, than from the open plains of professed Deism, because many are ready to reject the whole substance of the Christian institution, who would be shocked at the thought of relinquishing the name.

If Christianity is to be learned out of the New Testament, and words have any meaning affixed to them, the fundamental principles of it are these—That mankind come into this world in a depraved and fallen condition;—that they are placed here for a while, to give them an opportunity to work out their salvation, that is, by a virtuous and pious life to purge off this guilt and depravity, and recover their lost state of happiness and innocence, in a future life;—that this they are unable to perform, without the grace and assistance of God;—and that after their best endeavours, they cannot hope for pardon from their own merits, but only from the merits of Christ, and the atonement made for their transgressions by his sufferings and death. This is clearly the sum and substance of the Christian dispensation; and

and so adverse is it to all the principles of human reason, that, if brought before her tribunal, it must inevitably be condemned. If we give no credit to its divine authority, any attempt to reconcile them is useless ; and, if we believe it, presumptuous in the highest degree. To prove the reasonableness of a revelation, is in fact to destroy it ; because a revelation implies information of something which reason cannot discover, and therefore must be different from its deductions, or it would be no revelation. If God had told us, that we come into this world in a state of perfect innocence, void of all propensities to evil ; that our depravity proceeds entirely from the abuse of that free-will, with which he has been pleased to endue us ; that, if in this life we pursue a virtuous conduct, we have a right to be rewarded, and if a vicious, we may expect to be punished in another, except we prevent it by repentance and reformation, and that these are always in our own power—if God had informed us of nothing more, this would have

have been no revelation, because it is just what our reason, properly employed, might have taught us ; but if he has thought proper, by supernatural means, to assure us, that our situation, our relations, our depravity, our merits, and our powers, are all of a kind extremely different from what we imagine ; and that his dispensations towards us are founded on principles which cannot be explained to us, because, in our present state, we are unable to comprehend them ; this is a revelation, which we may believe, or not, according to our opinion of its authority ; but let us not reason it into no revelation at all.

The writers of the New Testament frequently declare, that the religion which they teach, is a mystery, that is, a revelation of the dispensations of God to mankind, which without supernatural information we never could have discovered ; thus St. Paul says, " Having made known to us the mystery of " his will." What then is this mystery ? not the moral precepts of the gospel ; for they are no more a mystery than the ethics of Aristotle,

Aristotle, or the Offices of Cicero : the mystery consists alone in these very doctrines, which the Rationalist explodes, because they disagree with the conclusions of his reason ; that is, because they are mysteries, as they are avowed to be by those who taught them.

But these bold advocates for reason, understand not its extent, its powers, or the proper application of them. The utmost perfection of human reason, is the knowledge of its own defects, and the limits of its own confined powers, which are extremely narrow. It is a lamp which serves us very well for the common occupations of life, which are near at hand, but can shew us no prospect at a distance : on all speculative subjects, it is exceedingly fallacious, but in none so frequently misleads us, as in our religious and political inquiries ; because, in the former, we draw conclusions without premises ; and in the latter, upon false ones. Thus, for instance, reason tells us, that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could
never

never permit any evil, natural or moral, to have a place in his works; because his goodness must induce him, and his power enable him, to exclude them: this argument is unanswerable by any thing but experience, which every hour confutes it. Thus again, reason assures us, that sufferings, though they may be just punishments for past crimes, and a means to prevent them for the future, can never be compensations for them; much less can the sufferings of one being atone for the guilt of another: against this no objection can be urged, except the belief of mankind, in all ages and nations, and the express declarations of revelation; which unanimously contradict it, and afford sufficient grounds for our concurrence. In these two instances we are deceived by misapplying our reason to subjects in which we have no premises to reason upon; for, being totally ignorant on what plan the universal system is formed and supported, we can be no judges of what is good or evil with regard to the whole; and, as we know not for
what

what ends either guilt or sufferings were ever admitted, we must be unable to comprehend what connections between them may possibly be derived from those ends. In our political discussions, reason equally misleads us; in these, she presents us with schemes of government, in which, by the most admirable contrivances, justice is so impartially administered, property so well guarded, and liberty so effectually secured, that in theory it seems impossible, that any people under such wise regulations can possibly fail of being happy, virtuous, and free; but experiment soon convinces us, that they are inadequate to these salutary purposes, and that, in practice, they are productive only of anarchy and confusion. Here our errors arise from reasoning on false premises, that is, from supposing that mankind will act on principles incompatible with the vices, the follies, and the passions of human nature. If reason, therefore, is so fallible a judge in the little and low concerns of human policy, with which she is daily conversant, how absurd

furd is the Rationalist, who constitutes her sole arbiter in the discussions of the most sublime subjects, of which she has not the least comprehension, the attributes and dispensations of the Almighty, our relations to him, and our connections with past and future states of existence !

Of all men, who are called Christians, the Rationalist seems to have the least pretence to that denomination : the Church of England acknowledges the belief of all the doctrines of this institution in her articles, though in them they are ill explained, and worse expressed ; the Church of Rome assents to them all, but adds many without sufficient authority ; the Calvinist denies them not, but disgraces them by harsh, obscure, and absurd comments ; the Quaker admits them, but is bewildered by enthusiastic notions of partial inspirations ; and the Methodist subscribes to them all with the utmost veneration, but (inconsistently) depreciates the merit of moral duties, at the same time that he insists on the practice of the

the most rigid; but the Rationalist repro-
 bates the whole, as impious, ridiculous, and
 contradictory to the justice of God, and the
 reason of man. Nor is he less 'adverse to
 the spirit, than to the letter of this religion :
 the true Christian is humble, teachable, and
 diffident ; the Rationalist is assuming, obsti-
 nate, and self-sufficient : the Christian hopeth
 all things, feareth all things, and believeth
 all things ; the Rationalist hopeth for no-
 thing, but from his own merits, feareth no-
 thing from his own depravity, and believeth
 nothing, the grounds of which he cannot
 perfectly understand. Why then must he
 be a Christian ? no man is now compelled to
 come in, nor more obliged to be a Christian,
 than a Free-mason ; the belief of it is not
 necessary to his advancement in life, nor his
 progress in any profession ; we know that he
 may be a lawyer, a physician, or even a di-
 vine, without it. If, on an impartial enqui-
 ry, he is a religious and moral Deist, why not
 own it ? Such were Socrates, Plato, and
 Cicero ; and it is still a character by no
 means

means disgraceful to a virtuous man. I blame no one for want of faith, but for want of sincerity ; not for being no Christian, but for pretending to be one, without believing. The professed Deist gives Christianity fair play ; if she cannot defend herself, let her fall ; but the rational Christian assassinate her in the dark : the first attacks Christ, as did the multitude, with swords and staves ; the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiss.

DISQUISITION VII.

ON GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTY.

IF any one casts his eye on the title of this essay, short as it is, he will scarcely be persuaded to read any farther; as he will rationally conclude, that, on a subject so hackneyed by the best and worst writers of all ages, from Aristotle to the newspaper politicians of the present times, nothing can be added, which can afford either instruction or entertainment: but so many absurd principles, concerning government and liberty, have of late been disseminated with unusual industry; principles as false as mischievous, as inconsistent with common sense as with all human society; that it seems necessary that they should not pass quite unnoticed, especially as they require nothing more, than to be fairly stated, to be refuted. The most

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considerable

considerable of them are the following; to each of which I shall say a few words.

1st. That all men are born equal.

2dly. That all men are born free.

3dly. That all government is derived from the people.

4thly. That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed.

5thly. That no government ought to last any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the two contracting parties, that is, to the governed, as to the governors.

First then; That all men are born equal; by which proposition, if it is only meant, that all men are equally born, that is, that one man is as much born as another, I shall not dispute its truth: but in every other sense it is entirely false; for we daily see, that some are born with beautiful and healthy bodies, and some with frames distorted, and filled with the most deplorable diseases;

diseases ; some with minds fraught with the seeds of wisdom and genius, others with those of idiotism and madness ; some, by the laws and constitution of their countries, are born to the inheritance of affluent fortunes and distinguished honours, others to a life of poverty, labour, and obscurity. How these can be said to be born equal, I cannot comprehend. If by this proposition is to be understood, that, at the time of their birth, all men are possessed of an equal share of power, wealth, wisdom, learning, and virtue ; when they are equally incapable of possessing any ; this would be no less ridiculous, than to assert, that all men are born with teeth of the same length, when none of them are born with any teeth at all. But, supposing they were all born equal ; would this prove, what is always intended to be proved by it, that they ought always to continue so ? or can any argument be drawn from thence, against their future inequality and subordination ? must no man presume to be six feet high, because, perhaps, he was born of the same

size as another, who is now but four? must no man assume power over another, because they were born equal, that is, because at their birth they were both incapable of exercising any power whatever? Thus, we see, this mighty argument, drawn from the supposed natural equality of mankind, by which all powers and principalities are threatened to be overthrown, is entirely false, and if true, is nothing to the purpose for which it has been so often and so pompously introduced.

Secondly; That all men are born free. This is so far from being true, that the first infringement of this liberty is being born at all; which is imposed upon them, without their consent, given either by themselves or their representatives; and it may easily be shewn, that man, by the constitution of his nature, never subsists a free and independent being, from the first to the last moment of his residence on this terrestrial globe: where, during the first nine months of his existence, he is confined in a dark and sultry prison, debarred from light and air; till at length,
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by an Habeas Corpus brought by the hand of some kind deliverer, he is set at liberty : but what kind of liberty does he then enjoy ? he is bound hand and foot, and fed upon bread and water, for as long a period ; no sooner is he unbound, than he makes so bad a use of his liberty, that it becomes necessary that he should be placed in a state of the severest discipline, first under a nurse, and then a schoolmaster, both equal tyrants in their several departments ; by whom he is again confined without law, condemned without a jury, and whipt without mercy. In this state of slavery he continues many years, and at the expiration of it, he is obliged to commence an involuntary subject of some civil government ; to whose authority he must submit, however ingeniously he may dispute her right, or be justly hanged for disobedience to her laws. And this is the sum total of human liberty. Perhaps it may be said, that all this may be ingenious ridicule, but cannot be intended for serious argument ; to which I reply, that it is the most serious

argument that can be offered, because it is derived from the works, and the will of our Creator ; and evidently shews, that man was never designed by him to be an independent and self-governed being, but to be trained up in a state of subordination and government in the present life, to fit him for one more perfect in another : and, if it was not a reflection too serious, I should add, that, in the numerous catalogue of human vices, there is not one which so compleatly disqualifies him from being a member of that celestial community, as a factious and turbulent disposition, and an impatience of controul ; which frequently assumes the honourable title of the love of liberty.

Thirdly ; That all government is derived from the people. This is another fallacious proposition ; which in one sense is true, but, with regard to the principles so often established upon it, entirely false. It is true, indeed, that all government is so far derived from the people, that there could be no government if there were no people to be governed :

verned: if there were no subjects there could be no kings, nor parliaments if there were no constituents, nor shepherds if there were no sheep; but the inference usually drawn from this proposition is utterly false, which is, that, because all government is derived from the people, the people have a right to resume it, and administer it themselves, whenever they please. But whatever claim they may have to this right, the exercise of it is impracticable, from the very nature of government; for all government must consist of the governors, and the governed; if the people at large are the governors, where shall we be able to find the governed? All government is power, with which some are intrusted, to controul the actions of others; but how is it possible that every man should have a power to controul the actions of every man? this would be a form of government, which we have heard sometimes recommended as the most perfect, in which all are governed by all; that is, in other words, where there is no government

at all. I agree with these pretended patriots, that the people in every country have a right to resist manifest grievances and oppressions, to change their governors, and even their constitutions, on great and extraordinary occasions ; whenever they groan under the rod of tyranny, they have a right to shake it off, and form a constitution more productive of liberty ; and, in like manner, if they find themselves torn by irreconcilable factions, and debilitated by internal contentions, they have an equal right to change it for a government more arbitrary and decisive. But we shall not agree so well in our definition of that important and misapplied term ‘ the people ;’ by which I would be understood to mean the whole body of a nation, advised and directed by the most respectable members of it ; who are possessed of rank, property, wisdom, and experience : But who are those in this country, whom our modern demagogues distinguish by this name, and vest with this supreme dominion ? Not the hereditary peers of the realm ; not the representatives

presentatives of this very people in parliament assembled; not the pastors of the church, the sages of the law, or the magistrates who are guardians of the public safety; not the possessors of landed property, the opulent stockholder, or the wealthy merchant. These are all represented as tools of ministers, lovers of slavery, united in a conspiracy to destroy their country and ruin themselves: they point out to us no defenders of our liberties or properties, but those who have themselves neither; no public-spirit, but in the garrets of Grub-street; no reformation, but from the purlieu of St. Giles's; nor one Solon, or Lycurgus, but who is to emerge from the tin-mines of Cornwall, or the coal-pits of Newcastle. These are not the people whom I should chuse to trust with unlimited power, because I know they are totally incapable of employing it to any salutary purpose, even for themselves; and, whatever might be our grievances, redress from such hands would be much more intolerable.

Fourthly;

Fourthly; That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed. This imaginary compact is represented by some, as a formal agreement entered into by the two contracting parties, by which the latter gives up part of their natural independence, in exchange for protection granted by the former; without which voluntary surrender, no one man, or body of men, could have a right to controul the actions of another; and some have gone so far as to assert, that this surrender cannot be made binding by representation, that parents cannot consent to it for their children, or nations for individuals, but that every one must give his personal concurrence, and that on this alone the constitution of every government is or ought to be founded: but all this is a ridiculous fiction, intended only to subvert all government, and let mankind loose to prey upon each other; for in fact, no such compact ever was proposed or agreed to, no such natural independence ever possessed, and consequently can never have been given up.

up. We hear a great deal about the constitutions of different states, by which are understood some particular modes of government, settled at some particular times, which ought to be supported with religious veneration through all succeeding ages : in some of these, the people are supposed to have a right to greater degrees of liberty than in others, having made better bargains for themselves, and given up less of their natural independence : but this, and all conclusions drawn from these premises, must be false, because the facts on which they are founded are not true ; for no such constitutions, established on general consent, are any where to be found ; all which, we see, are the offsprings of force or fraud, of accident, and the circumstances of the times, and must perpetually change with those circumstances : in all of them, the people have an equal right to preserve or regain their liberty, whenever they are able. But the question is not, what right they have to liberty, but, what degree of it they are capable of enjoying, without accomplishing

accomplishing their own destruction. In some countries this is very small, and in none can it be very great, because the depravity of human nature will not permit it. Compact is repugnant to the very nature of government; whose essence is compulsion, and which originates always from necessity, and never from choice or compact; and it is the most egregious absurdity, to reason from the supposed rights of mankind in an imaginary state of nature, a state the most unnatural, because in such a state they never did or can subsist, or were ever designed for. The natural state of man is by no means a state of solitude and independence, but of society and subordination; all the effects of human art are parts of his nature, because the power of producing them is bestowed upon him by the author of it. It is as natural for men to build cities, as for birds to build nests; and to live under some kind of government, as for bees and ants; without which he can no more subsist than those social and industrious insects; nor has he either more right, or power,

power, than they, to refuse his submission. But if every man was possessed of this natural independence, and had a right to surrender it on a bargain, he must have an equal right to retain it ; then he has a right to chuse, whether he will purchase protection at the price of freedom, or whether he prefers liberty and plunder to safety and constraint : a large majority of mankind, who have neither property nor principles, would undoubtedly make choice of the latter, and all these might rob, and murder, and commit all manner of crimes with impunity ; for, if this their claim to natural independence is well founded, they could not be justly amenable to any tribunal upon earth, and thus the world would soon become a scene of universal rapine and bloodshed. This shews into what absurdities we run, whenever we reason from speculative principles, without attending to practicability and experience : for the real truth is no more than this, Every man, by the constitution of human nature, comes into the world under such
a degree

a degree of authority and restraint as is necessary for the preservation and happiness of his species and himself ; this is no more left to his choice, than whether he will come into the world, or not ; and this obligation he carries about with him, so long as he continues in it. Hence he is bound to submit to the laws and constitution of every country in which he resides, and is justly punishable for disobedience to them. To ask a man whether he chuses to be subject to any law or government, is to ask him, whether he chuses to be a man, or a wild beast, and wishes to be treated accordingly. So far are men from being possessed of this natural independence, on which so many systems of anarchy have been erected, that submission to authority is essential to humanity, and a principal condition on which it is bestowed : man is evidently made for society, and society cannot subsist without government, and therefore government is as much a part of human nature, as a hand, a heart, or a head ; all these are frequently applied to the worst
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of purposes, and so is government ; but it would be ridiculous from thence to argue, that we should live longer and happier without them. The Supreme Governor of the world has not determined who shall be his vicegerents, nor what forms of government shall be adopted ; but he has unalterably decreed that there shall be some ; and therefore, though no particular governors can lay claim to a divine right of ruling, yet government itself is of divine institution, as much as eating, and for the same reason, because we cannot subsist without it.

Fifthly ; That no government ought to subsist any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the governed as to the governors. If this proposition is adopted, and by advantage wealth and power are to be understood, there is an end of all government at once ; for the greatest share of these must be possessed by the governors ; because without it they could not govern : power and property always accompany each other, and power is government ; these, therefore, must

must reside with those who govern ; and, how often soever these may change hands, and the condition of individuals be altered, with regard to the community the case must eternally be the same : on this principle, therefore, the governed would have a perpetual right to resist, and every government ought to be dissolved at the moment of its commencement : on this principle, the lowest of the people, in every country, may at any time be incited to rebel, and their rebellion be justified ; for, while they feel themselves oppressed with poverty, and condemned to labour, and behold their superiors enjoying all the pomps and luxuries of life, it will be easy to persuade them, that they receive greater benefits from government than themselves, and that, for that reason, they have a right to subvert it : this right they are always ready to assert, and will not so easily be dissuaded from the attempt, by being told, what is certainly true, that they really receive as much benefit from government as those who govern ; because,

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by that alone, they are every day prevented from tearing one another to pieces : but this argument will have but little weight, because they will never be convinced, that this is any benefit, and not rather an infringement of their natural rights.

In short, all these wild and extravagant principles are the production of ignorance, or ambition, invented and propagated either by those who are unacquainted with human nature, and human government, or those who endeavour to render it impracticable in the hands of others, that it may fall into their own ; and all terminate in one absurd conclusion, which is, That government is an unjustifiable imposition, and violation of the rights of nature, and ought to be eradicated from the face of the earth. But, happily for the world, whenever men presume to reason against the course of nature, and the decrees of Providence, their arguments, however ingenious, have but little effect ; for government there must be, so long as there are men, and the dispute will

still continue to be, that only of who shall govern.

It is an old and a just observation, that the loudest advocates for liberty have always been the greatest tyrants whenever they have got power into their hands ; and this must necessarily be ; because a love of liberty is an impatience of controul, and, when this impatience of controul is united with power, resistance is an infringement of their liberty who possess it, and is treated by them with severity, in proportion to their impatience of controul ; and thus the same disposition, which in a subject constitutes a patriot, in a prince creates a tyrant. This shews, that an extraordinary zeal for liberty is nothing more than an extraordinary fondness for power, that is, a power to controul the actions of others, uncontrouled ourselves ; and this love of liberty does not arise so much from our fears of being ill-governed, as from our dislike of being governed at all. So true is this, that I am fully persuaded, that if an angel was sent from heaven, vested with irresistible power,

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to govern any country upon earth, and was to execute his commission with the utmost degree of wisdom, justice, and benevolence, his dominions would very soon be deserted by most of the inhabitants ; who would rather chuse to suffer mutual injuries and oppressions, however grievous, under any government in which they themselves had a share, than to be compelled to be virtuous and happy by any superior authority whatever.

The usual fallacy of which democratic writers avail themselves, is this—they constantly charge all the numerous evils inherent in all human governments to the account of the governors ; which for the most part are imputable with more propriety to the governed : it is owing to their vices that there is any such thing as government, or any occasion for it ; and consequently all its attendant evils must be derived from the same source. It is their crimes, which require punishment, and their venality which makes corruption necessary ; war, with all its horrors, springs from their depravity, the vio-

lence of faction, the avarice of commerce, the ambition of the rich, and the profligacy and idleness of the poor : princes are made tyrants by the perverseness and disobedience of their subjects, and subjects become slaves from their incapacity to enjoy liberty. Every governor is in the situation of a gaoler, whose very office arises from the criminality of those over whom he presides ; these sometimes suffer much from the abuse of his power ; but they would suffer more from their mutual ill-usage, if unrestrained by his superintendant authority. A vicious and corrupt people can never be free, because they are obliged to take shelter under despotism, which alone can defend them from the oppressions and injuries which they would every hour inflict upon each other ; and a virtuous people will never be slaves, because they stand in need of no such defence.

We cannot fall into a more common, or more pernicious error, than to imagine, that, because liberty is our supreme blessing, we, for that reason, can never have too much :

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if this was true, government would indeed be a grievance, and ought every where to be abolished; but the blessings of liberty, like all others bestowed upon mankind, are circumscribed within certain bounds, and become misfortunes by excess: dominion is not allotted to the few, for their own, but for the benefit of the many over whom they rule, and no greater degree of power should ever be trusted in the hands of man, than is requisite for that end; but to so much every community must submit for its own preservation; and this is the only standard by which a just proportion of liberty can be ascertained. Every nation is by no means happy in proportion to the degree of freedom which it enjoys, but, as that degree is adapted to the circumstances and the dispositions of the people; and with them must frequently change. The same degree of power, which happily governs a small, industrious, virtuous, and frugal state, is totally unable to restrain the avarice, ambition, and faction of an extensive, rich, and

luxurious empire: as the still and crystal lake is quietly bounded by the flowery banks which surround it; whilst the turbulent and tempestuous ocean can be confined only by tremendous rocks and aspiring mountains. The greatest degree of liberty, which any people can enjoy, is, to be governed by equitable and impartial laws; but these cannot be administered, but either by their voluntary submission, or by superior force; if the first is refused, the latter must be exerted, and then liberty subsists no more: and hence it is evident, that those who will not be contented with the greatest degree of this invaluable blessing, must quickly find themselves deprived of the least; and that every people, who, from false and impracticable notions of liberty, refuse to submit to any government of their own, must very soon, from the constitution of human nature, be obliged to receive it under the yoke of some foreign power, which is wiser, and therefore stronger, than themselves.

D I S.

DISQUISITION VIII.

ON RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE zealous advocates for religious liberty, frequently attack us with this triumphant question, What has government to do with men's religion? to which I answer, Nothing; provided men's religion had nothing to do with government: but our religious and political opinions and interests are so intimately connected, and so blended together, that it is impossible to divide them. Were religious controversies relative to speculative doctrines only, government would have neither right or inclination to interfere in them; but such are by no means the objects of contention: these doctrines, believed by few, and understood by fewer, are nothing more than the signals of parties struggling for superiority, not for truth; for, as in civil contests men persecute each other for

wearing ribands of different colours, so do they in religious, for professing different opinions ; not that they have any objections to the ribands, or the opinions, but because both are the marks by which those are distinguished who are adverse to their pursuits. Protestants never institute severe penal laws against Papists because they believe transubstantiation, (for why should they not believe it, if they can?) but, because the profession of that doctrine is the test, by which those are known to be members of a church which would infringe their liberties, and devour a great part of their property ; on the other hand, the Church of Rome does not persecute Protestants because they cannot assent to this doctrine, but, because the disavowal of it is the signal that they are desirous to pull down that fabric of wealth and power, which they have erected for themselves, and are unwilling to part with : opinions are held forth as marks of distinction, but ambition and interest are the real causes of the dispute.

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It will perhaps be said, that, notwithstanding this may be true, there are many, very many pious and honest persons, who, on the strictest examination, and clearest conviction, have adopted opinions on religious subjects, of which they are laudably tenacious, and cannot relinquish without violating both their reason and their conscience; and that of these, for which they are accountable to God alone, no government can have a right to take cognizance, much less to controul. To all this I readily agree, so long as they continue to be opinions only; but whenever they shoot up into actions, which is their natural process, they then come within the line of human jurisdiction, and government is obliged to take notice of them, not from choice, but from necessity, and self-preservation: for every religious sect holds principles more or less productive of arbitrary power, liberty, or anarchy, which must necessarily affect the civil constitutions under which they are professed; as they are the most dangerous, as well as the most common

mon combustibles, which knavery employs to set folly and ignorance in a flame, whenever it may be subservient to her interest. All religious sects, however they may differ in other points, agree in one, which is the pursuit of power, and this by the same progressive steps—by first imploring toleration, next claiming equality, and then struggling for superiority over all the rest. Government cannot remain an unconcerned spectator of these contentions, in which her own existence is at stake, but must stretch out a pacific hand to compose them: this she can effect by no other method, than by taking one, which she most approves, under her protection, maintaining its ministers, and forming her public worship agreeably to its doctrines; that is, in other words, by an establishment: and thus we see, that some religious establishment must necessarily make a part of every national constitution; which necessity proceeds not from any natural connection between religion and government, but, because the artifice, ignorance, and superstition

perstition of mankind never fails to unite them : and hence, I apprehend, arises that alliance between church and state, which has been so much discussed, and so little understood.

The establishment of one religion ought always to be accompanied by an unlimited toleration of all others, on the principles of both justice and policy ; of justice, because, although every government has a right to bestow her protection and emoluments on any mode of religion which she most approves, she can have no right to enforce the belief or exercise of that, or to prohibit the profession of any other, by compulsive penalties ; of policy, because such a toleration is the most effectual means of putting an end to all religious dissensions, which springing, for the most part, from a love of singularity and contradiction, thrive under persecution, and, when they cease to be opposed, they cease to exist.

If some establishment is thus necessary, so must be some tests, or subscriptions, by
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which the friends of this establishment may be distinguished, and the principles of those who are admitted into it ascertained ; without which it would be no establishment at all : but every wise government will take care to make these as comprehensive as the nature of their institutions will admit, in order to lessen the number of her enemies ; for most assuredly such will all be who are excluded. Whoever are enemies to the religious constitution of any country, whatever they may pretend, can never be friends to its civil ; for it is impossible that an honest man, who believes his own religious profession to be true, and most acceptable to his Creator, should ever be cordially attached to a constitution which discourages the exercise of it, and patronizes another, which appears to him to be false and impious. Extend this comprehension as widely as possible, it will exclude many pious and worthy persons, who are tenacious of different principles ; and narrow it to any degree, it will still admit all those who have none : nor is it inexpedient

expedient that they should be admitted ; for every state has a right to avail itself of their assistance, who, though they are not so good men, may be better subjects ; as these may be induced by interest to support the constitution of their country, while those are compelled by principle to subvert it.

Those who will not conform to any Christian establishment, give these reasons for their dissent ;—that the religion so established is imperfect, corrupted, and dissimilar to the genuine purity of that holy institution ; and that they are in duty bound to reject such a religion, and to search for another, which appears to them to be more perfect and pure. The first of these reasons is unhappily true, but no apology for their conduct ; the latter, entirely a mistake, and therefore ought not to be regarded.

First then, the charge of imperfection and corruption may be made good against any established religion that ever existed. It must be liable to many imperfections from its own nature, and the nature of man ; in
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its original institution, it must lean to the errors and prejudices of the times ; and, how much soever it is then approved, it cannot long preserve that approbation, because, human science being continually fluctuating, mankind grow more or less knowing in every generation, and consequently must change their opinions on religious, as well as on all other subjects ; so that, however wisely any established system may be formed at first, it must, from the natural increase or decrease of human knowledge, be found or thought to be erroneous in the course of a few years : and yet the change of national religions cannot keep pace with the alterations of national opinions, because such frequent reviews and reformatations would totally unhinge men's principles, and subvert the foundations of all religion and morality whatever. It must likewise be corrupted by the very establishment which protects it, because by that it will be mixed with the worldly pursuits of its degenerate votaries ; and it must be extremely dissimilar to its original purity, or it would

would be incapable of being established ; for pure and genuine Christianity never was, nor ever can be the national religion of any country upon earth. It is a gold too refined to be worked up with any human institution, without a large portion of alloy ; for, no sooner is this small grain of mustard-seed watered with the fertile showers of civil emoluments, than it grows up into a large and spreading tree, under the shelter of whose branches the birds of prey and plunder will not fail to make for themselves comfortable habitations, and thence deface its beauty, and destroy its fruits.

These imputations on religious establishments are certainly just, but no reasons for dissensions, because the inference which makes the latter proposition is entirely a mistake ; for no man can be bound in duty to desert a national religion, on account of defects congenial to its nature, nor to search for perfection, which is no where to be found. Some religious establishment is absolutely necessary to the existence of every state ;

state ; but it is not necessary that this should be perfect, and free from all errors and corruption, nor even that it should be so esteemed by those who conform to it : it is sufficiently perfect for this purpose, if it contains nothing repugnant to the principles of sound morality, and the doctrines of Christ. The mass of the people in every country, being incapable of making any accurate enquiry into religious subjects, must have a religion ready made, or none at all ; and in this, those of superior abilities may conscientiously join, without impeding their further researches into the dispensations of Providence, and the duties of man. Great and numerous must be the inconveniences of any religious establishment in the hands of men ; but what would be the condition of any nation in which there was none ? No uniform mode of public worship could there be adopted ; no edifices built or repaired for the celebration of it, nor ministers maintained to perform it, except at the will of an ignorant and discordant multitude, the majority
of

of whom would chuse rather to have neither worship, churches, or ministers, than to incur the expences which must attend them. Every man, who had any sense of religion, would make one for himself; from whence innumerable sects would spring up, each of which would chuse a minister for themselves; who, being dependent for subsistence on the voluntary and precarious liberality of his congregation, must indulge their humours, submit to their passions, participate of their vices, and learn of them what doctrines they would chuse to be taught; and consequently none but the most ignorant and illiterate would undertake so mean and beggarly an employment. A people thus left to the dominion of their own imaginations and passions, and the instructions of such teachers, would split into as many sects and parties, divisions and subdivisions, as knavery and folly, artifice, absurdity, and enthusiasm, can produce; each of which would be attacked with violence, and supported with obstinacy by all the rest. This evidently demon-

strates, that some religious establishment must be annexed to every civil government; the members of which are so far from being bound in duty to desert it, because it falls short of their ideas of purity and perfection, that they are obliged by all the ties of benevolence and society to conform to and support it, unless it requires any concessions positively criminal.

Should it still be insisted on, that every man is obliged to profess and exercise that religion which appears to him most consonant to reason, and most acceptable to God, with which no government can have a right to meddle, or power to controul; in answer I shall only say, that all this is undoubtedly a mistake, which arises from applying propositions to men, as members of national communities, which are applicable to them only as individuals. Mankind, so long as they reside on this terrestrial globe, ought always to be considered in a two-fold capacity; as individuals, and as members of society; that is, as men, and as citizens: in which different situations,

situations, so different are their relations and duties, that there is scarce a proposition which we can affirm of them with truth in one, which is not false if applied to them in the other. It is by this misapplication that the zealous advocates for unbounded liberty, civil and religious, deceive their followers, and sometimes themselves, and draw conclusions equally destructive of all government and religion. Thus, for instance, they assert that all men are by nature free, equal, and independent : this, when applied to men as a general species, is true ; they then apply this assertion to men who are members of civil communities, to whom subordination is necessary, and obedience to their superiors an indispensable duty, and therefore in regard to whom it is absolutely false ; and yet from hence they endeavour to prove, that government is an infringement of the natural rights of mankind. In like manner they affirm, that every man is obliged to make choice of that religion, and to adhere to that mode of worship, which appear to

his judgment to be the purest, and most acceptable to his Creator : this proposition, likewise, with regard to men considered as individuals, is true ; but this again they apply to members of national communities, and established churches : with regard to whom it is not true ; for, as such, they are bound in duty to profess that religion, and practise that mode of worship, which the laws of that community enjoin, provided they find nothing in them positively evil : yet from hence they would persuade us, that every individual has a right to desert, or even to oppose, the established religion of his country, whenever he finds, or fancies he can find a better. Thus are their unwary admirers deceived : the truth of these propositions they cannot deny, and have not perhaps sagacity sufficient to discover their misapplication.

It is remarkable, that Christianity constantly addresses us as men, never as citizens ; the only duty it requires of us under that character, is submission to power in general, but

but prescribes no rules for our political conduct : all those divine precepts of patience, meekness, long-suffering, non-resistance of evil, contempt of the world, and indifference to the things of it, are given us as individuals, but not as members of national communities ; because in that character they would have been impracticable : for no state can administer her internal policy, and much less regulate her conduct with regard to foreign powers, in conformity to these commands ; because the imperfections, the passions, and the vices of mankind will not permit it. Any one as an individual may pay obedience to them ; to those who have little to do with the busy occupations of the world, it is an easy and a pleasing task ; for those who are deeply and earnestly engaged in the most innocent of them, it is extremely difficult ; but for those who are employed in the great concerns of political communities, in carrying on war, negotiating peace, and managing the intrigues of contending factions, it is absolutely impracticable. This I

take to be the cause of those frequent declarations from the Author of this religion, that neither himself nor his doctrines are of this world ; but adverse to all its pursuits : and this perhaps may be the reason of that assertion, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God ; because, rich men being usually most engaged in these pursuits, most attached to the world, and most involved in the business of it, the extreme difficulty of their admission is thus forcibly expressed : or, if by a rich man, is here meant a great man, that is, a conqueror, a hero, or a statesman, this declaration may perhaps be literally true ; and that it should in this place be so understood, seems no improbable conjecture, as a rich man, and a great man, in most languages are synonymous terms. The first Christians saw their religion in this light, and refused to have any concern with government, unless to obey it ; they inquired not into the rights of those who ruled, nor their own to liberty, and wished

wished for nothing, but to pass through this life unincumbered with its business, and well prepared for a better : so long as they were a small sect, dissenting from the religions of the countries in which they lived, this inoffensive conduct was easily preserved ; but, when princes and nobles adopted their religion, and by such illustrious examples it became almost universal, these principles or inactivity were no longer tenable, without the total dissolution of all government ; for, if no man would govern, there could be none : necessity therefore obliged them to take a part ; a part soon awakened ambition, and love of power, those passions so natural to the human heart, and induced them to seize the whole ; Christianity was established, in consequence corrupted, and little more of it remained, except the name.

To this opinion of the incompatibility of Christianity with the occupations and customs of the world, were all those numerous monastic institutions, which every where accompanied its progress, indebted for their origin ;

origin; institutions certainly favourable to the genuine spirit of that religion, but, like the religion itself, so adverse to the nature of man, that they can never be made fit for general use: could they have been confined to those few, who are capable of employing solitude in devotion and religious contemplation, they would undoubtedly have been conducive to the practice of every Christian virtue; but, as all were indiscriminately admitted, who pretended to sanctity, or who mistook enthusiasm for piety, and a quarrel with the world for the love of God, they could not fail very soon to become nothing better than retreats for laziness, and seminaries of superstition and vice: yet, notwithstanding all their abuses, I am inclined to think there are still within their walls some few instances of patience and resignation, devotion and charity, carried to a higher degree of perfection than they are or can be in any other situation, in which the fashions, the pleasures, and business of life, and the corruptions of national establishments, must more
or

or less obstruct their progress ; where our virtue must be endangered by continual temptations, our meditations diverted from celestial objects by worldly pursuits ; our devotions interrupted by amusements and impertinence ; and that serene cheerfulness and happy complacency, so essential to the Christian profession, must frequently be disturbed by injuries and disappointments. The voluntary hardships which many of these recluses imposed upon themselves, were probably derived from a mistaken notion, that suffering was an essential part of their religion ; a notion which they had perhaps contracted from that constant connection between them, which they had so long observed and felt during their persecutions, and were not able suddenly to abandon, in happier and more indulgent times.

But why then establish a religion, which is so improper for the purpose ? Because it is less improper than any other. The establishment of some religion is necessary to the existence of every state, and it is as ne-

cessary that this should be, or be thought, a revelation from God. Mere Deism never was, or can be, the established religion of any country ; for, as all its principles must be derived from the reason of some, they will always be controverted by the reason of others, and can therefore never obtain a general acquiescence. The philosopher, by learned investigations, and the force of his own understanding, may be convinced of the great truths of natural religion ; but, without the sanction of supernatural authority, he will never be able to convince others, who will neither believe his doctrines, or obey his precepts. If Christianity, therefore, is not adopted, some fabulous system must supply its place ; and, if some established religion there must be, it is surely more eligible to make a true than a fictitious revelation the basis of it. Nor will any one, I suppose, assert, that it would be preferable to establish Paganism or Mahometism, and lay Christianity by for private use ; which, disfigured as it is by worldly connections, is

still superior to all other institutions. As members therefore of political communities, we are bound to accept it with all its imperfections ; though, as individuals, we ought always to approach as near to its original purity, as our own imperfections will permit.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.



